MARVEL

PARADISE

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PARADISE X

Collecting Paradise X issues 0, 1-5, Xen & Heralds 1-3

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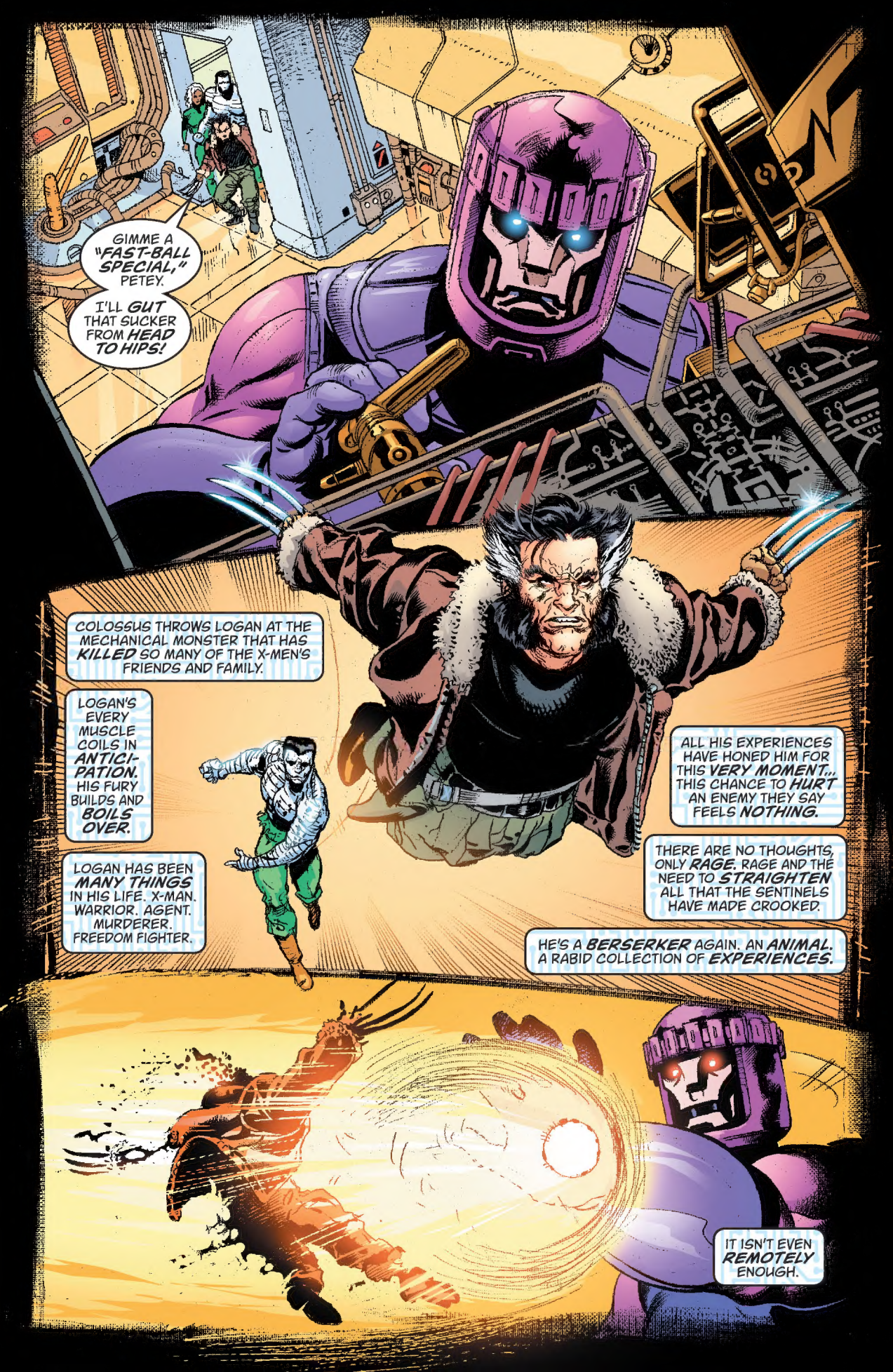
PARADISE X: HERALDS #1

ON THIS WORLD, A WORLD WHERE THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN OVERRUN BY THE RULE OF MUTANT-HUNTING SENTINELS, I WATCH THE LAST MOMENTS OF THE X-MEN.
I PLAY IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN BEFORE MAKING MY DECISION.
THE SENTINELS WON'T EXPECT AN ATTACK ON THEIR MAIN HEAD-QUARTERS, THE BAXTER BUILDING.
TRUE. I WILL TAKE THE LEAD, LOGAN.
STORM TAKES OUT ONE OF THE SENTINELS BY CALLING DOWN THE LIGHTNING THAT, DESPITE HER AGE, SHE STILL COMMANDS.
BAXTER BUILDIN
WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG?
EASY, PETEY. NEXT STOP THE ROOF, AN' THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES.
FOR A MOMENT I AM TEMPTED TO CHOOSE ONE OF THE OTHERS. BUT SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH THEM. SOMETHING SEEMS TO BE... MISSING.
SOMETHING ALREADY SEEMS TO BE DEAD WITHIN THEM, AND I AM UNCERTAIN I WOULD BE ABLE TO REBUILD THAT.

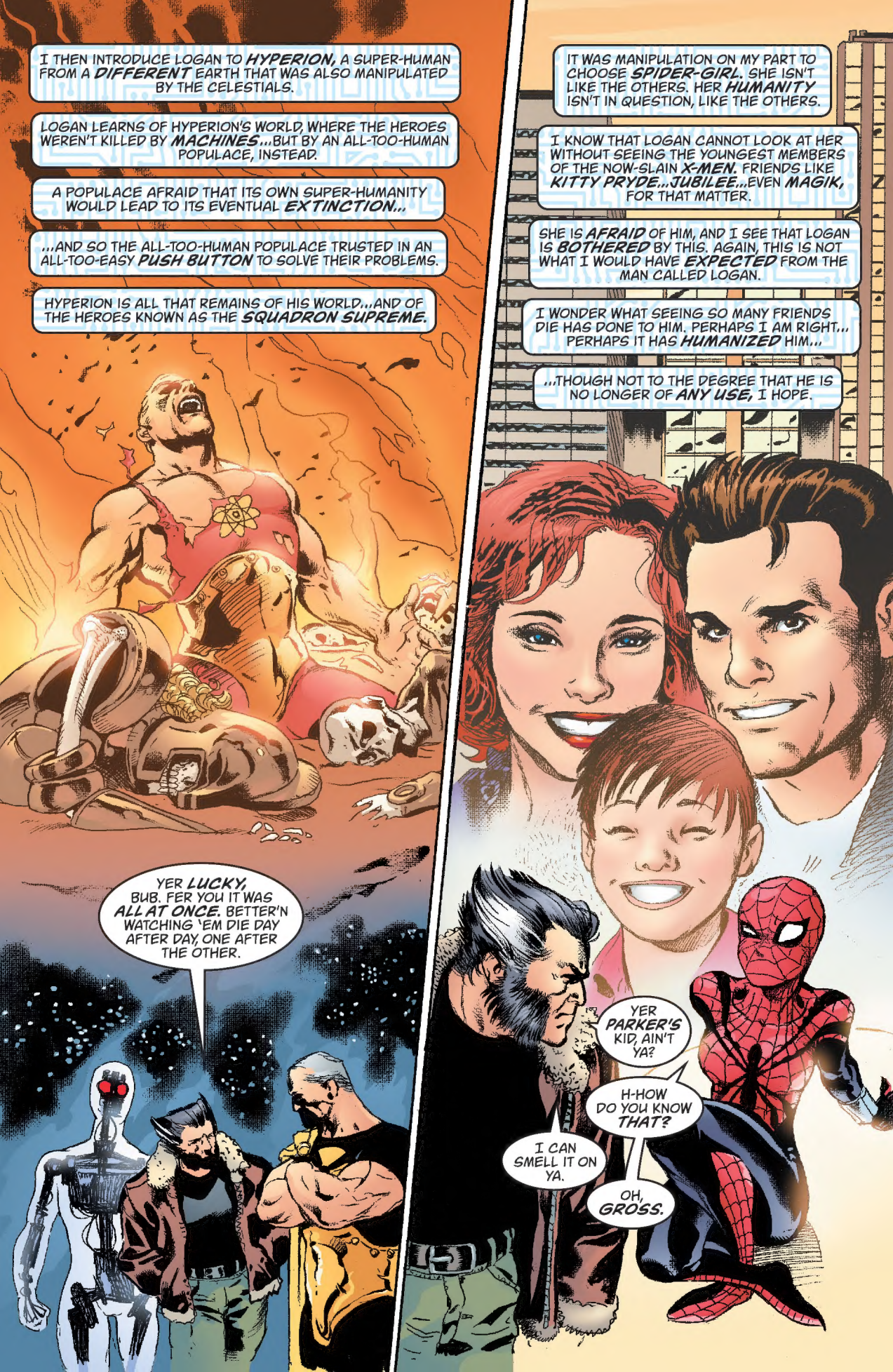

GIMME A "FAST-BALL SPECIAL," PETEY.
I'LL GUT THAT SUCKER FROM HEAD TO HIPS!
COLOSSUS THROWS LOGAN AT THE MECHANICAL MONSTER THAT HAS KILLED SO MANY OF THE X-MEN'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY.
LOGAN'S EVERY MUSCLE COILS IN ANTICI-PATION. HIS FURY BUILDS AND BOILS OVER.
LOGAN HAS BEEN MANY THINGS IN HIS LIFE. X-MAN. WARRIOR. AGENT. MURDERER. FREEDOM FIGHTER.
ALL HIS EXPERIENCES HAVE HONED HIM FOR THIS VERY MOMENT... THIS CHANCE TO HURT AN ENEMY THEY SAY FEELS NOTHING.
THERE ARE NO THOUGHTS, ONLY RAGE. RAGE AND THE NEED TO STRAIGHTEN ALL THAT THE SENTINELS HAVE MADE CROOKED.
HE'S A BERSERKER AGAIN. AN ANIMAL. A RABID COLLECTION OF EXPERIENCES.
IT ISN'T EVEN REMOTELY ENOUGH.

STORM DOES NOT LAST MUCH LONGER.
COLOSSUS DIES A MOMENT LATER.
AND WOLVERINE...
...I WONDER HOW HE WILL FEEL ABOUT BEING GIVEN LIFE BY A MECHANICAL MAN?
WHAT WILL HE THINK OF ME?

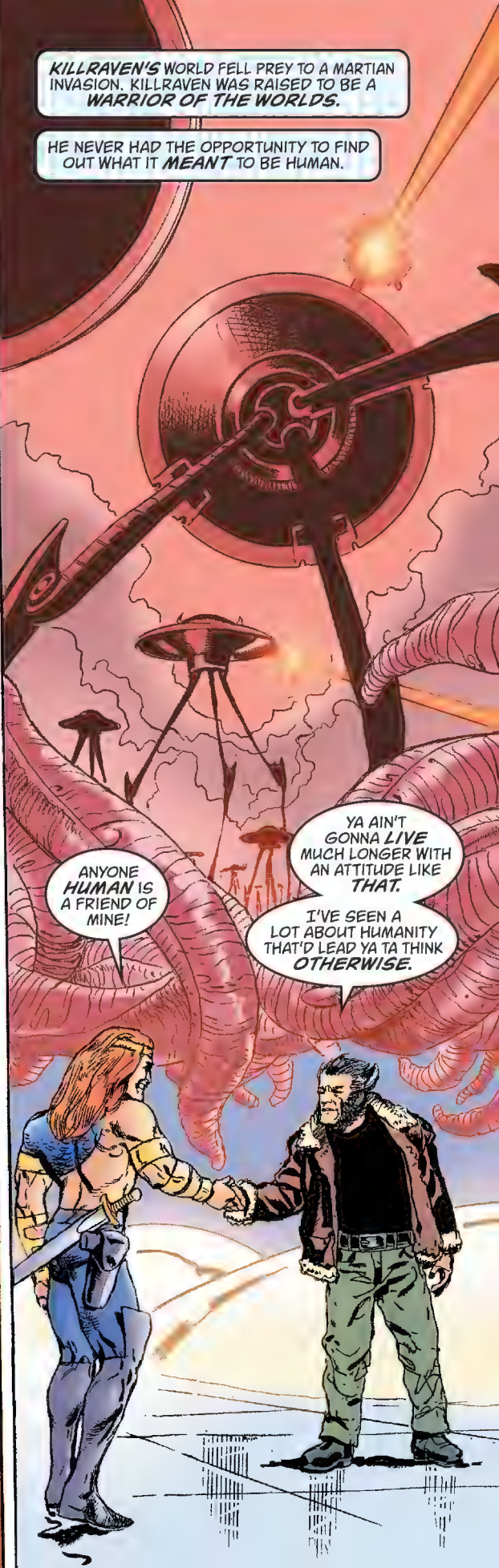
WHAT THE BLAZES?!
'RORO...?
...PETEY?
THEY ARE NOT HERE, LOGAN. THE SENTINELS KILLED THEM.
THEY KILLED YOU, AS WELL
THEN THIS MUTANT HEALIN' FACTOR A' MINE'S A LOT STRONGER THAN EVEN I THOUGHT!
CALM YOURSELF, LOGAN. I AM NOT A SENTINEL. I AM X-51.
I REBUILT YOUR BODY.
I BROUGHT YOU BACK TO LIFE.

I TAKE IT YA BROUGHT ME BACK WITH THIS STUFF?
YES. IT COMES FROM MERLIN'S REALM. HE ONCE USED IT TO RECREATE THE BODY AND SOUL OF CAPTAIN BRITAIN, YEARS BEFORE HE JOINED THE X-MEN.
"AFTER YOUR DEATH, YOUR BODY WAS EASILY TAKEN FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING.
"I KNEW YOUR BRAIN CELLS WOULD HAVE BEEN PROTECTED FROM THE SENTINELS BY YOUR ADAMANTIUM SKULL.
"MY CONCERNS WERE UNFOUNDED."
JUST LIKE THAT, HUH?
WHAT ABOUT PETEY OR 'RORO? WHY NOT BRING THEM BACK?
I DON'T THINK I COULD. THEIR PAIN WAS TOO GREAT. THE IDEA OF SAVING A WORLD OTHER THAN THEIR OWN WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH FOR THEM.
I'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE, HAVEN'T I? THE SCENT... THIS IS THE WATCHER'S PLACE, RIGHT?
COME WITH ME, LOGAN.

SO WHAT ABOUT MY SOUL? HOW DO YOU "REBUILD" THAT?
THE WOLVERINE I AM FAMILIAR WITH DOES NOT BELIEVE IN A SOUL, NOR WOULD HE EVER ASK SUCH A QUESTION.
THIS IS GOOD.
WELL, WHEN YER WORLD GOES TO HELL, YA HOPE FER AN ALTERNATIVE.
THEN LET ME OFFER YOU ONE.
COME, LOGAN. YOU ARE AMONG FRIENDS...
...OR, AT THE VERY LEAST, ALLIES.


I THEN INTRODUCE LOGAN TO HYPERION, A SUPER-HUMAN FROM A DIFFERENT EARTH THAT WAS ALSO MANIPULATED BY THE CELESTIALS.
LOGAN LEARNS OF HYPERION'S WORLD, WHERE THE HEROES WEREN'T KILLED BY MACHINES...BUT BY AN ALL-TOO-HUMAN POPULACE, INSTEAD.
A POPULACE AFRAID THAT ITS OWN SUPER-HUMANITY WOULD LEAD TO ITS EVENTUAL EXTINCTION...
...AND SO THE ALL-TOO-HUMAN POPULACE TRUSTED IN AN ALL-TOO-EASY PUSH BUTTON TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS.
HYPERION IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF HIS WORLD...AND OF THE HEROES KNOWN AS THE SQUADRON SUPREME.
YER LUCKY, BUB. FER YOU IT WAS ALL AT ONCE. BETTER'N WATCHING 'EM DIE DAY AFTER DAY, ONE AFTER THE OTHER.
IT WAS MANIPULATION ON MY PART TO CHOOSE SPIDER-GIRL. SHE ISN'T LIKE THE OTHERS. HER HUMANITY ISN'T IN QUESTION, LIKE THE OTHERS.
I KNOW THAT LOGAN CANNOT LOOK AT HER WITHOUT SEEING THE YOUNGEST MEMBERS OF THE NOW-SLAIN X-MEN. FRIENDS LIKE KITTY PRYDE...JUBILEE...EVEN MAGIK, FOR THAT MATTER.
SHE IS AFRAID OF HIM, AND I SEE THAT LOGAN IS BOTHERED BY THIS. AGAIN, THIS IS NOT WHAT I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED FROM THE MAN CALLED LOGAN.
I WONDER WHAT SEEING SO MANY FRIENDS DIE HAS DONE TO HIM. PERHAPS I AM RIGHT... PERHAPS IT HAS HUMANIZED HIM...
...THOUGH NOT TO THE DEGREE THAT HE IS NO LONGER OF ANY USE, I HOPE.
YER PARKER'S KID, AIN'T YA?
H-HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
I CAN SMELL IT ON YA.
OH, GROSS.

I INTRODUCE LOGAN TO LUTHER MANNING NEXT. IS IT PRIDE ON MY PART THAT I HAVE CHOSEN THOSE WHOM I HAVE? OR IS IT SOMETHING ELSE? I'VE CHOSEN SO MANY WHO ARE PART HUMAN, PART MECHANICAL...LOGAN, MANNING, THE OTHERS.
DID I PICK MANNING BECAUSE OF THE COMPUTER THAT HAS REPLACED ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF HIS FLESH? OR BECAUSE OF THE HUMANITY THAT WASN'T DESTROYED WITH THE REST OF HIS BODY?
MANNING IS NOW KNOWN AS DEATHLOK. HE WAS CREATED TO BE A SOLDIER, A KILLING MACHINE. HIS BUILDERS HOPED THE COMPUTER IMPLANTED WITHIN HIM WOULD OVERRIDE HIS ABILITY TO MAKE INDEPENDENT DECISIONS. THEY WERE WRONG.
JUST AS THEY WERE WRONG ABOUT ME.
HEY.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HIM YET.


KILLRAVEN'S WORLD FELL PREY TO A MARTIAN INVASION. KILLRAVEN WAS RAISED TO BE A WARRIOR OF THE WORLDS.
HE NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANT TO BE HUMAN.
ANYONE HUMAN IS A FRIEND OF MINE!
YA AIN'T GONNA LIVE MUCH LONGER WITH AN ATTITUDE LIKE THAT.
I'VE SEEN A LOT ABOUT HUMANITY THAT'D LEAD YA TA THINK OTHERWISE.

'RORO! YOU'RE STILL ALIVE?

BLOODSTORM--ORORO MUNROE--IS THE ONLY MEMBER OF THIS TEAM THAT LOGAN HAS HAD A PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH...OR AT LEAST WITH HER COUNTERPART FROM ANOTHER REALITY.
PERHAPS HER HUMANITY IS THE MOST IN QUESTION.
BUT WHAT IS HUMANITY APART FROM ITS THIRST FOR SOMETHING BETTER THAN ITS CURRENT STATION? HAS HER VAMPIRISM COST HER HER BEING?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD...
I AM. YOU HAD BETTER KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, LOGAN.

ARNO STARK COMES FROM A WORLD WHERE HE AND I WERE ENEMIES. BUT I WILL NOT BE AN ENEMY OF MANKIND.
PERHAPS THE KNOWLEDGE I HAVE COLLECTED WILL MAKE HIM AN ALLY.
HE DRESSES IN METAL AS I ONCE DRESSED IN HUMANITY.
HE WAS A VILLAIN ONCE. NOW I WILL MAKE HIM A HERO.
WHERE I COME FROM, THE MUTANTS WERE ALREADY DEAD AND BURIED... A FOOTNOTE, AT BEST.
SO YER THE NEXT IRON MAN? GUESS YA'VE GOT TO HAVE SOME SORT OF HEART PROBLEM TO WEAR THE SUIT.
YOU'RE NEXT, MUTIE TRASH.

CAN YOU ACTUALLY BE ***SERIOUS*** ABOUT THIS NEW QUARRY, X-51?

YOU WILL CHANGE ***NOTHING.*** MY ***BROTHERS*** WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS. THEY WATCH THEIR WORLDS JUST AS I ONCE DID MINE...

WHO'S ***THAT?***

THE OLD ***WATCHER.*** THIS WAS HIS HOME BEFORE HE CALLED ME HERE TO BECOME HIS ***REPLACEMENT.***

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM. HE'S THE ONLY ONE I'VE EVER MET WHOSE BLINDNESS IS ***INFECTIOUS.***

THIS IS THE STORY OF HUMANITY'S ACHIEVEMENTS. WE WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT WE ***MIGHT*** HAVE BEEN.

THE ***CELESTIALS*** DETERMINED THAT.

HEY, THAT'S MY ***DAD!***

ONE OF THEM.

THE CELESTIALS REPRODUCE BY ***IMPREGNATING*** ANY GIVEN WORLD WITH THEIR SEED.

THEY THEN ***EMPOWER*** THAT PLANET'S INDIGENOUS SPECIES WITH THE ABILITIES TO ***PROTECT*** THEIR WORLD.

THEY BELIEVE THEMSELVES TO BE ***HEROES.*** BUT THE HEROES ARE MERELY UNKNOWING ***ANTI-BODIES*** PROTECTING THEIR MOTHER EARTH.

THAT'S ALL ***ANY*** OF YOU ARE.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT ***UATU*** AND THE ***CELESTIALS*** WOULD HAVE YOU BELIEVE.

ON THE EARTH WHERE I COME FROM, WE STOPPED THE BIRTH OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO THANKS TO ***REED RICHARDS*** AND THE POWER OF HIS SON.

SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I CAN COME UP WITH QUESTIONS ***MYSELF.*** HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO ***US?*** WHY DO WE ***EXIST,*** THEN?

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, LUTHER, THAT WE "HEROES"...THE BEINGS THEY MANIPULATED US INTO BECOMING... AREN'T EVEN AWARE OF THE CELESTIALS' INFLUENCE.
IN FACT, ONE OF THOSE MANIPULATED BEINGS BELIEVED HE WAS THE DEVIL MEPHISTO HIMSELF...
...AND BELIEVING THIS TO BE TRUE, THAT THERE WAS A JUDGMENT DAY COMING.
THIS MEPHISTO CREATED A ROAD-BLOCK OF SORTS IN LINEAR TIME...WITH A DETOUR THAT SENT TIME BACK IN AN ONGOING SERIES OF CYCLES, CREATING ALTERNATE WORLDS AND HISTORIES...
...WHICH EVENTUALLY ALLOWED HIM TO ESCAPE WHAT HE PERCEIVED TO BE THE END OF HISTORY.
IN THIS WAY, MEPHISTO BECAME IMMORTAL, THE ETERNAL DEVIL HE ONLY THOUGHT HIMSELF TO BE.
YER GONNA EXPLAIN ALL THIS TO ME LATER, RIGHT, 'PUTER?
WOULD YOU SHUT UP, DEATHLOK?
SO OUR EXISTENCE IS AN ACCIDENT? THE RESULT OF MANIPULATION FROM A BEING WHO ONLY THOUGHT HE WAS SOMETHING GREATER THAN HE ACTUALLY WAS?
YES. I AM SO SORRY.
DON'T BE. I ALWAYS KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG.
I THINK WE ALL DID, BUB.
SO WHICH IS THE REAL WORLD, THEN? YOURS, X-51?
I AM NOT SURE, KILLRAVEN... WE ALL MIGHT BE JUST FRAGMENTS OF THE ORIGINAL, FOR ALL I KNOW.
I'VE HEARD THAT THERE WAS A UNIVERSE BEFORE OURS...ONE THAT WAS DESTROYED BY THE CARELESSNESS OF THE CELESTIALS. PERHAPS THAT IS THE REAL ONE.
SO WHY ARE WE HERE?

WE MUST WARN EACH OF THE ALTERNATIVE EARTHS ABOUT THE CELESTIAL GROWING AT THE CORE OF THEIR PLANET...
...BY BRINGING THE REVELATION I JUST SHOWED YOU TO THE REED RICHARDS OF EACH WORLD.
LOOK, I'M NOT CERTAIN MY EARTH IS EVEN WORTH SAVING ANYMORE. THE MARTIANS HAVE PRETTY MUCH--
AN' NEW YORK IS AS GOOD AS NUKED ON MY WORLD. UNLESS YOU CAN SEND US TO THE PAST, I'M NOT CERTAI--
IF I SEND YOU TO THE PAST, IT WILL ONLY EXTEND MEPHISTO'S REALM AND CREATE ANOTHER WORLD TO GIVE WARNING TO.
INSTEAD, THERE ARE OTHER WORLDS TO SAVE NOW...OTHER CONTINUITIES BESIDES YOUR OWN THAT REQUIRE AID.
I HAVE WATCHED EACH OF YOUR LIVES AND SPOKEN TO YOU INDIVIDUALLY...
...YOU WILL BE REWARDED FOR YOUR HEROISM. I HAVE SEEN WHAT EACH OF YOU MOST DESIRES, AND BY UTILIZING UATU'S EQUIPMENT, I CAN OFFER IT TO YOU.
I HAVE PAIRED YOU INTO TEAMS AND WILL TRANSPORT YOU AS CLOSE TO THE RICHARDS OF THESE WORLDS AS POSSIBLE.
THESE COMMUNICATORS WILL HELP YOU CONTACT ME.
DOESN'T SOUND LIKE WE HAVE ANY CHOICE...
DON'T YOU MEAN ANY "ALTERNATIVE"?

HYPERION AND I ARE SENT TO A WORLD WHERE SCIENCE IS CONSIDERED BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE NATURAL ORDER.
THE DIVERGENCE POINT FOR THIS PARTICULAR CONTINUITY OCCURRED WITH THE DISCOVERY OF A MYSTIC AMULET BELONGING TO THE ANCIENT HYBORIAN WIZARD, KULAN GATH.
REED RICHARDS WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AN OUTLAW ON THIS EARTH.
WHAT KIND OF WORLD HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME TO, X-51?
I BELIEVE THEY ONCE CALLED HIM "STRETCH," DID THEY NOT?!
ARE WE ALREADY TOO LATE?
THIS FATE AWAITS ALL THAT HOLD ON TO THE OLD WAYS OF SCIENCE! THIS IS MY WORLD NOW!
I WILL NOT BE BOUND BY SUPERSTITIOUS, OUTMODED THINKING OF MATHEMATICS AND LOGIC!
I AM KULAN GATH!
DO NOT PRAY FOR ME, BUT TO ME!
BUT SCIENCE IS NECESSARY TO SAVE THIS WORLD! HOW CAN WE OVERCOME REED'S DEATH?
RICHARDS IS DEAD...? WHO CAN SAVE THIS PLACE NOW?
SINCE I AM GOD HERE, I BELIEVE THAT QUESTION SHOULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD ME.
I DEFY EXPLANATION, STRANGER.

DEATHLOK AND KILLRAVEN ARE SENT TO A CONTINUITY RULED BY THE POWER-MAD SATYRNIN.
WHILE MY APPEARANCE MIGHT SUGGEST SCIENCE TO THE CONTINUITY HYPERION AND I VISITED...
...HERE, ONLY THOSE TRAINED FOR WAR MIGHT SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO ACTUALLY FIND AND WARN THAT REALM'S REED RICHARDS.
YEAH, YEAH, 'PUTER. I KNOW THIS IS BEYOND YOUR DIAGNOSTIC ABILITIES. HOW DO YOU THINK I FEEL?
HUMANITY BUILT THIS? IT'S GLORIOUS.
OTHER-WORLDERS! HALT IN THE NAME OF HER SUPREMACY!
WHY DON'T I THINK THIS IS THE WAY TO BEGIN OUR AMBASSADOR-SHIP?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! WE'LL JUST TELL THEM TO TAKE US TO THEIR LEADER!
DON'T YOU EVER SAY THAT AGAIN! MARTIAN HUMOR DOESN'T WORK WITH ME!

MY COMPUTER SAYS THAT IF WE JUST LAY DOWN OUR WEAPONS AND GIVE UP THAT CHANCES ARE PRETTY GOOD WE'LL BE BROUGHT INTO SATYRNIN'S PRESENCE.
WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU SURRENDERED?
NEVER.
THOUGHT SO.

WHERE ARE WE... BLOODSTORM, IS IT?
ANOTHER WORLD. AND YES, IT IS.
SO WHAT ARE YOU GETTING OUT OF THIS? THAT ROBOT SAID THERE WAS SOMETHING WE ALL WANTED. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
A CURE FOR MY HUNGER, IRON MAN. IT HAS... CONSUMED EVERYONE I'VE EVER CARED FOR. IT HAS CONSUMED ME. AND I WILL BE FREE OF IT.
DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY I'M DOING THIS?
NO.
MY SENSORS READ NO LIFE-FORMS HERE. INCLUDING YOU, VAMPIRA.
THAT HAS TO BE THE REASON WHY THEY PUT US TOGETHER. I'M THE ONLY ONE WITH ARMOR THICK ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND YOUR TEETH.

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY YOU WERE CHOSEN... BUT WHY WAS I?
ARE YOU CERTAIN NO ONE IS HERE? I THINK I SMELL SOMETHING.
THIS ARMOR IS THE MOST ADVANCED FORM OF TECHNOLOGY KNOWN TO MAN, BELA. THESE LENSES ALLOW ME TO SEE ANYTHING LIVING AROUND US. THERE'S NOTHING HERE, BELIEVE ME.
MAYBE YOU'RE JUST SORE THAT YOU'VE GOT DINNER IN FRONT OF YOU AND NO CAN-OPENER.
SHUT UP! WE'RE IN BIG TROUBLE.
DOES YOUR ARMOR HAVE FLARE CAPABILI-TIES?
'COURSE IT DOES. BUT I DON'T SEE WHAT DIFFERENCE IT'S GOING TO MAKE. IMAGINE A VAMPIRE AFRAID OF THE...
...DARK.

SO REED RICHARDS IS THE PRESIDENT? THAT'S GREAT! THIS IS GOING TO BE A PIECE OF CAKE!
DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD MAKE AN APPOINTMENT, WOLVERINE? WE CAN'T JUST WALK IN THERE AND SAY, "HEY, MR. PRESIDENT, WE'RE HERE TO SAVE YOUR WORLD."
HE'LL SEE US.
'SPECIALLY IF HE DOESN'T WANT ANOTHER OVAL ORIFICE.
THAT IS SO BAD.
YOU DO KNOW MY FATHER.
SO I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE... IS THERE A BELL OR A BUTTON WE NEED TO PRESS?
RELAX, KID. I THINK WE PRESSED IT ALREADY. SHOULDN'T YER SPIDER-SENSE HAVE WARNED US OF THIS?
IT'S BEEN GOING CRAZY EVER SINCE WE GOT HERE!
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE! HANDS IN THE AIR!
STAND BACK, SPIDER-GIRL.

OH MY GOD!
ARE-- ARE THEY DEAD?
NO. THEY WERE JUST DOING THEIR JOB. NOT THEIR FAULT THEY WERE HIRED TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE.
HERE.
THE PROBLEM WITH THAT TRICK IS THAT BY THE TIME I LEARNED IT, ALL THE PARTIES WERE OVER.
COME ON...

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS? THIS ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT GIVE IN TO TERRORISTS!
SORRY ABOUT YOUR GUARDS, PRESIDENT RICHARDS, BUT WE BRING INFORMATION THAT'S VITAL NOT ONLY TO THIS COUNTRY...BUT TO THE ENTIRE PLANET, TOO!
WE'RE FROM AN ALTERNATE REALITY.
I THINK THAT'S A LITTLE MUCH FOR EVEN THE PRESIDENT TO TAKE IN AT ONCE.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I AM... DO YOU?
UH...I THINK WE'RE IN TROUBLE, GIRL.
YOU THINK WE'RE IN TROUBLE? WHY? ISN'T THAT RICHARDS?
YEAH. JUST NOT THE RICHARDS WE THOUGHT HE WAS.

YOU SHOULD HAVE MADE AN APPOINT-MENT!
YIKES!

PARADISE X: HERALDS #2

YOU HAVE COME, AS I KNEW YOU WOULD.
I MUST WARN YOU, THOUGH. THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK ARE NOT EASILY ANSWERED, NOR IS MY GUILT SO EASILY WASHED...
...FOR ARE WE NOT ALL WATCHERS?
IT WAS INDEED MY MISTAKE TO THINK I COULD OVERWRITE THE ROBOT'S PROGRAMMING. BUT I NEEDED EYES AFTER MINE WERE TAKEN.
IT WAS ALSO MY MISTAKE TO REVEAL THE SECRETS I GUARDED TO THE RAT THAT RUNS THE MAZE...
...THE MYSTERIES OF THIS WORLD...AND ALL OTHERS.
THE CHILD AT THE HEART OF MY WATCH IS NOW DEAD, MURDERED BY THE GERMS THAT MY MASTERS EMPOWERED. AND SO I AM DAMNED.
BUT MY DAMNATION, IT NOW SEEMS, IS NOT ENOUGH.
NOW WITH THE AID OF GERMS EXTRACTED FROM OTHER ENVIRONS, STOLEN FROM SIBLING REALITIES, X-51 ATTEMPTS TO KILL THAT WHICH GIVES ALL WATCHERS PURPOSE.
LOGAN--WOLVERINE.
MAY PARKER--SPIDER-GIRL.
HYPERION--LAST SURVIVOR OF THE SQUADRON SUPREME.
LUTHER MANNING--DEATHLOK.
JONATHAN RAVEN--KILLRAVEN, WARRIOR OF THE WORLDS.
ORORO MUNROE--THE VAMPIRE, BLOODSTORM.
ARNO STARK--THE IRON MAN OF 2020.
HE ATTEMPTS THE GENOCIDE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE UNIVERSE.
HE DARES SUGGEST THAT THE VIRUS LIVE AT THE COST OF THE BODY.

FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, X-51 AND HYPERION HAVE TAKEN THEIR WARNINGS OF THE CELESTIAL MANIPULATIONS TO A WORLD WHERE MAGIC AND SUPERSTITION SHAPE THE POLITICS OF THE DAY...
X-51 HAS TARGETED THE REED RICHARDS OF EACH WORLD TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ENTRUSTED TO HIM WHILE ACTING ON MY BEHALF.
"...X-51 HAS TARGETED THE REED RICHARDS OF EACH WORLD TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ENTRUSTED TO HIM WHILE ACTING ON MY BEHALF.
"KILLRAVEN AND DEATHLOK WERE SENT WITH A SIMILAR WARNING TO SATURNYNE'S WORLD.
"THERE THEY FOUND A WORLD CONTROLLED BY A WOMAN WHOSE APPETITE WAS DIRECTED TOWARD ALTERNATIVE REALITIES, AS WELL... NOT UNLIKE THE CELESTIALS.
"X-51'S PROGRAMMED BELIEFS REGARDING RIGHT AND WRONG ARE BEING PUT TO QUESTION WITH EVERY WORLD HIS TEAM JOURNEYS TO.
"WITH THE WORLD OVERRUN BY VAMPIRES THAT BLOODSTORM AND IRON MAN NOW VISIT, X-51 QUESTIONS WHETHER IT SHOULD BE SAVED AT ALL.
"COMPLETING X-51'S SQUAD ARE LOGAN, EXILED FROM A REALITY DESTROYED BY SENTINELS, AND PETER PARKER'S DAUGHTER, SPIDER-GIRL.
"THIS PAIR HAS COME TO A WORLD WHERE SPIDER-MAN LED THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AND REED RICHARDS INSTEAD BECAME THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES...
"...BUT THAT IS NOT ALL REED RICHARDS BECAME."

"YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SEE WHAT X-51 SEES. HIS COMPUTATIONS WILL NOT BE HIDDEN FROM YOU."
DEAR GOD, HYPERION! YOU KILLED THEM?!
YOU MANIAC!
WHAT WAS IT LIKE, HYPERION?
WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO TREAT LIFE SO SENSELESSLY? TO NOT RESPECT AN ENEMY AT ALL? TO TREAT HUMAN LIFE AS CARELESSLY AS THE CELESTIALS DO?
WE CAME TO BRING A WARNING, HYPERION... WHETHER THIS WAS A BENEVOLENT WORLD OR NOT.
I KNOW YOU ALONE SURVIVED THE ATTACK THAT ATOMIZED THE SQUADRON SUPREME AND EVERY OTHER SUPERHUMAN ON YOUR EARTH...
...AND I KNOW WHAT YOU ASKED FOR IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR HELP...
...BUT I NEVER WANTED THIS. NOT THIS.
WHAT HAVE I DONE BRINGING YOU HERE?
WE CAME TO WARN THEM...

YOUR KIND... IS NOT WELCOME HERE. THE AGE OF SCIENCE IS...OVER. IT DOES THE TYBURN JIG EVEN NOW.
YOU CAME FOR RICHARDS, DID YOU NOT?
THIS... :KAFF:...IS THE PLACE OF TRUE POWER. INVISIBLE POWER.
RICHARDS' SHOW OF POWER IS ILLUSION. AS IS... :KAFF:... YOURS.
THIS ILLUSION IS CHOKING THE LIFE FROM YOUR BODY, WORM.

YOU'RE LIKE EVERY ONE OF THEM! THE SCARLET CENTURION--MASTER MENACE--EVERY STUPID VILLAIN WITH EVERY STUPID NAME I EVER TRIED TO BEAT SOME SENSE INTO!
NOW I KNOW I NEVER BEAT THEM HARD ENOUGH.
FOR GOD'S SAKE, HYPERION, THERE'S BEEN ENOUGH DEATH ALREADY!
THE DEATHS HAVE BEEN COUNTLESS. WHAT'S ONE MORE ADDED TO COUNTLESS?
LISTEN TO ME, KULAN GATH! I REMEMBER YOU FROM THAT DAY YOU WERE REAWAKENED AND FOUGHT SPIDER-MAN. I REMEMBER YOU FROM WHAT YOU DID TO THE X-MEN AND THE CITY OF NEW YORK.
MY FATHER ASSEMBLED ME IN THE MIDST OF A MILITARY ORGANIZATION HE BELIEVED TO BE THE ENEMY OF ALL MANKIND...

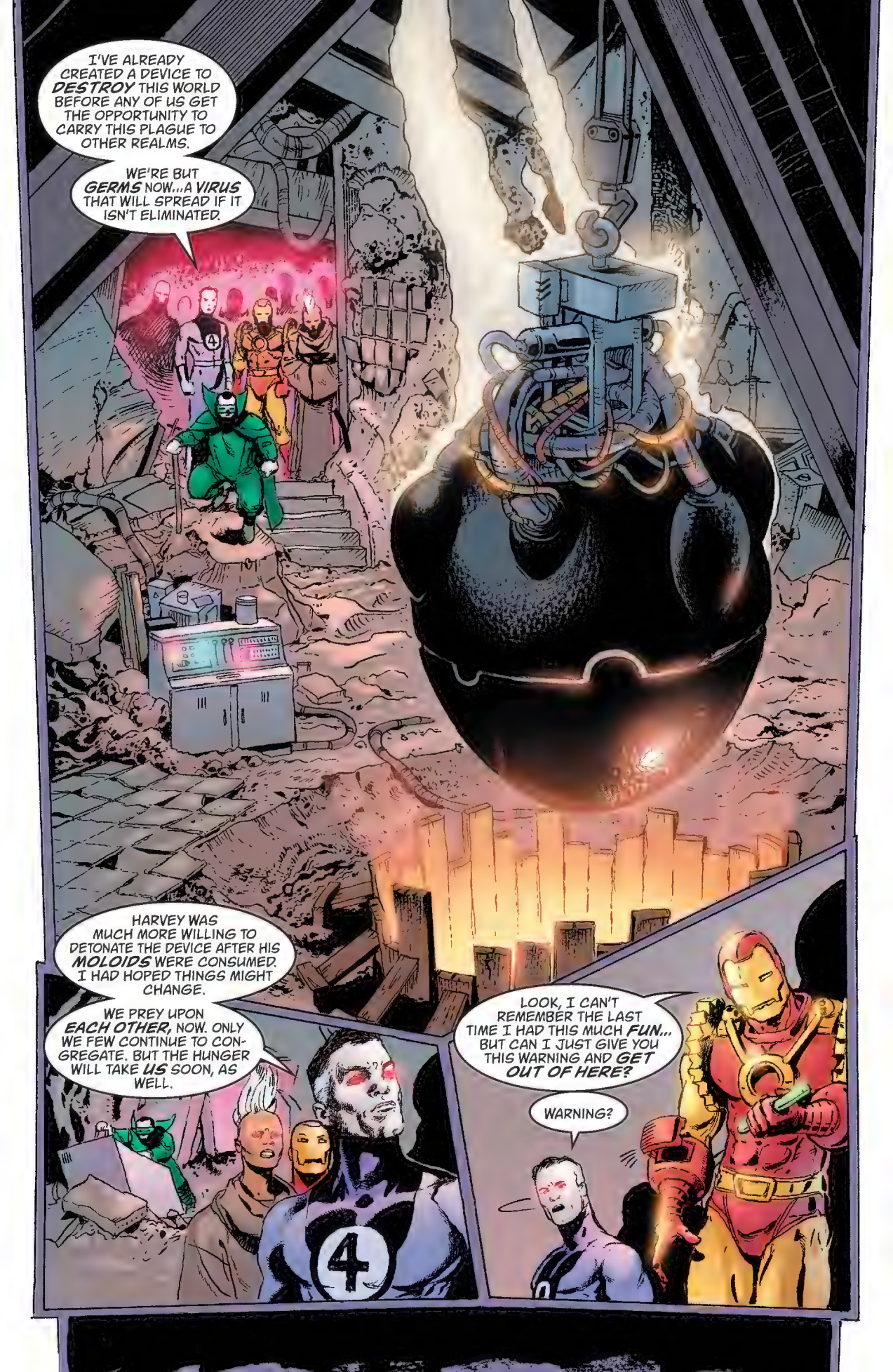
...AND UNTIL THE DAY HE DIED, MY FATHER NEVER GAVE UP HOPE THAT THEY MIGHT TURN FROM THEIR LOVE OF WAR AND BECOME MEN OF PEACE INSTEAD.
I EXPECT NO LESS OF YOU.
THIS WORLD IS IN DANGER. I BRING YOU A WARNING...
OF WHAT?
AT THE HEART OF THIS WORLD IS A MONSTER WHOSE BIRTH WILL MEAN THE END OF ALL LIFE ON EARTH.
HYPERION AND I BROUGHT A MESSAGE FOR REED RICHARDS, BELIEVING HE ALONE WOULD BE ABLE TO DECIPHER A WAY TO STOP THIS MENACE.
YOU BELIEVE I AM NOT AWARE OF THE BEAST?
WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE SOURCE OF MY POWER?
VERY WELL, KULAN GATH.
YOU WIN.
HAVE YOU COME TO HELP US, MECHANICAL ONE?
ARE THERE ANY OTHER MEN OF SCIENCE STILL LIVING HERE? ANYONE I COULD LEAVE THIS WARNING WITH?

SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I KNOW YOU SAID WE'D FIND RICHARDS FASTER 'F WE JUST SURRENDERED...
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING OUT OF THIS ADVENTURE, LUTHER?
EVERYTHIN' I NEED TO KNOW TA OVERRIDE THE MECHANICAL. X-51'S GOT A WAY TA SHUT UP MY BETTER HALF... THE HALF I'VE HAD EVER SINCE MOST OF MY BODY WAS BLOWN OFF IN MILITARY WARGAMES.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. IT'S FOR MY OWN GOOD.
YOU, KILL-RAVEN?
I'M JUST TIRED OF FIGHTING THE MARTIANS, YOU KNOW?
I WANT TO KNOW WHETHER OR NOT WE HUMANS WIN. I WANT TO KNOW IF IT'S WORTH THE SACRIFICE.
OH MY GOD--LOOK AT HER! WE SHOULD HAVE SURRENDERED SOONER!
GREAT, AS IF I WASN'T FEELING BAD ENOUGH BEFORE. I LOST MY "BEST FRIEND" IN THE WAR.
UH... AM I MISSING SOMETHING?
NO. I AM.

YOU ARE THE CAUSE FOR THIS DAY'S VIOLENCE?
IS THE CYBORG YOUR SLAVE?
WE ONLY COME WITH A WARNING FOR REED RICHARDS...OF A GREAT DANGER TO YOUR WORLD. WE...APOLOGIZE FOR ANY LOSS OF LIFE THAT--
OH, THAT.
I'M CERTAIN WE CAN WORK SOMETHING OUT.
HM? OH...THIS DANGER YOU WARN OF WON'T AFFECT MY WORLD FOR ANOTHER THOUSAND YEARS.
AND WHO REALLY CARES WHAT HAPPENS THEN?
THE ONLY THING THAT CONCERNS ME IS THE NOW.
YOU HAVE THE LOOK OF A GOD. A FITTING PARTNER FOR A GODDESS.
I WILL SACRIFICE A HUNDRED SLAVES IN HONOR OF OUR MATING.
KILLRAVEN...UH, KILLRAVEN?
I'LL TELL YA HOW THE WAR ENDS-- IT DOESN'T.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. AN' QUIT TALKING TO ME ABOUT PHEROMONES. THE ONLY THING I CAN SMELL ANYMORE STINKS.

THIS IS ONE MESSED UP WORLD MACHINE MAN DROPPED US ONTO, BLOODSTORM. IT'S HIS REVENGE FOR WHAT I DID TO HIS ALTERNATIVE SELF, YOU KNOW? HE'S GETTING BACK AT ME.
I JUST CAN'T GET USED TO THE WAY "UNCLE TONY" HERE KEEPS LOOKING AT ME. THAT'S HOW YOU GET SQUARE-HEADED VAMPIRES, YOU KNOW?
SHUT UP, STARK. YOU HAVE ARMOR ON, NO ONE'S GOING TO BITE YOU. WE'RE HERE BECAUSE THIS WORLD NEEDS HELP. THEY NEED A CURE.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CONTROLLED BY HUNGER. TO NEED SUSTENANCE MORE THAN FRIENDSHIP...OR LOVE. YOU HAVE NO IDEA...
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, ISN'T IT? YOU WANT A CURE. AND YOU THINK X-51 CAN GIVE YOU ONE.
THIS WORLD DOES NEED HELP, BUT PERHAPS TOO MUCH AT THIS POINT. THERE ISN'T A CURE. IF THERE WAS, I WOULD HAVE ALREADY FOUND IT.
HUMANITY NO LONGER LIVES HERE.
THE QUESTION IS, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EVERYONE ON EARTH IS A VAMPIRE?
WHAT DO WE CONSUME WHEN THERE AREN'T ANY MORE PEOPLE?

ANY CURE WILL HAVE TO COME IN THE FORM OF JUSTICE, NOT MERCY.
BUT WE'RE BEYOND THAT NOW.
I'M NOT CERTAIN WE CAN HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER, MR. RICHARDS.
HOW WONDERFUL THAT YOU'VE COME BACK, RICHARDS! WHO ARE THESE TWO?
THEY ARE FRIENDS FROM ANOTHER WORLD WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE BRINGS HOPE, HARVEY.
I THINK I FINALLY HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO WHAT WE'VE BEEN PLANNING.
GOOD. THE TUNNEL IS READY.

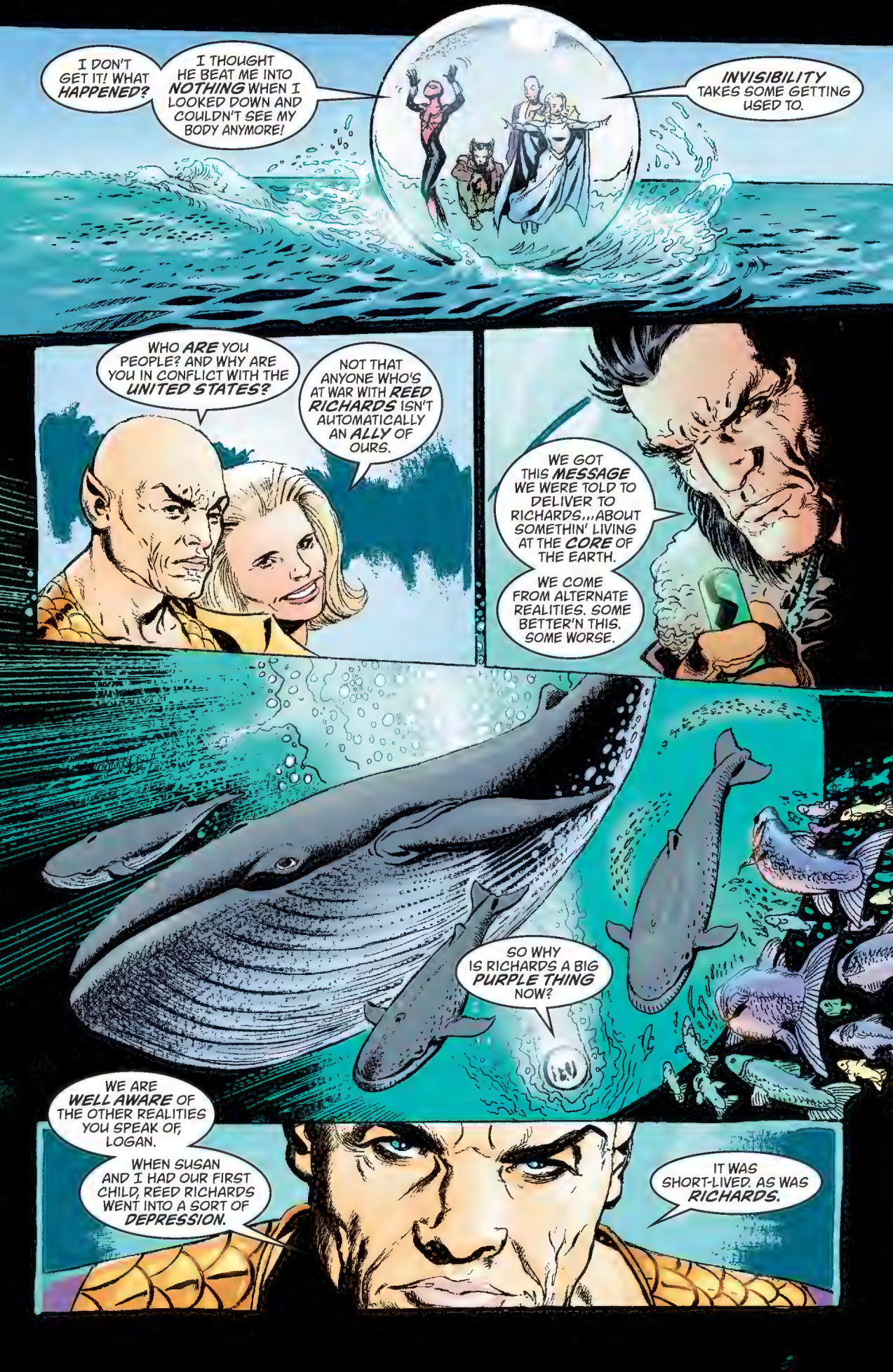

I'VE ALREADY CREATED A DEVICE TO DESTROY THIS WORLD BEFORE ANY OF US GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY THIS PLAGUE TO OTHER REALMS.
WE'RE BUT GERMS NOW...A VIRUS THAT WILL SPREAD IF IT ISN'T ELIMINATED.
HARVEY WAS MUCH MORE WILLING TO DETONATE THE DEVICE AFTER HIS MOLOIDS WERE CONSUMED. I HAD HOPED THINGS MIGHT CHANGE.
WE PREY UPON EACH OTHER, NOW. ONLY WE FEW CONTINUE TO CONGREGATE. BUT THE HUNGER WILL TAKE US SOON, AS WELL.
LOOK, I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I HAD THIS MUCH FUN... BUT CAN I JUST GIVE YOU THIS WARNING AND GET OUT OF HERE?
WARNING?

THERE'S A MONSTER AT THE HEART OF YOUR WORLD. IT'S THE REASON YOU HAVE THE POWERS YOU DO. THE REASON FOR THE HUNGER, EVEN. IT INFECTS EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING WILL BE CONSUMED IN ITS BIRTH.
ANOTHER VAMPIRE.
AAAHH! IT'S GONNA BITE ME!
SORRY.
I SUGGEST YOU LEAVE NOW, IRON MAN.
SUCK THIS!
TELL WHOEVER YOU RETURN TO THAT YOUR MESSAGE WAS ONE OF HOPE.
HOPE FOR A CHANGED WORLD. ONE WHERE THINGS ARE DIFFERENT. ONE WHERE WE AREN'T GERMS.

GOOD-BYE, HARVEY.
GOOD-BYE, REED.
IT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST HONOR OF MY LIFE TO COUNT YOU AS A FRIEND.

SOMETHIN' TELLS ME THIS PRESIDENT IS A LITTLE MORE TWO-FACED THAN MOST!
JOKES? YOU MAKE JOKES NOW? HOW MUCH TIME DID YOU SPEND WITH MY DAD?
I GOT 'IM, LOGAN! I GOT 'IM!
YOU COULDN'T LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE, COULD YOU?
YOU HAD TO FOLLOW ME HERE!
I :UGH: GOT... HUH... HIM?
YOU'VE GOT NOTHING.
...NOTHING?
WHERE...?

SUSAN?
DOESN'T THIS GO AGAINST YOUR RESTRAINING ORDER, MRS. MACKENZIE?
WELL DONE, SUSAN.
THEY DON'T CALL ME THE INVISIBLE WOMAN FOR NOTHING, DEAR HUSBAND. WELL...MAYBE FOR NOTHING.
THIS IS WAR! I'LL FIND YOU ONE DAY! I'LL SEARCH THIS PLANET AND DESTROY YOU ALL! DO YOU HEAR ME?
WAR!!!


I DON'T GET IT! WHAT HAPPENED?
I THOUGHT HE BEAT ME INTO NOTHING WHEN I LOOKED DOWN AND COULDN'T SEE MY BODY ANYMORE!
INVISIBILITY TAKES SOME GETTING USED TO.
WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE? AND WHY ARE YOU IN CONFLICT WITH THE UNITED STATES?
NOT THAT ANYONE WHO'S AT WAR WITH REED RICHARDS ISN'T AUTOMATICALLY AN ALLY OF OURS.
WE GOT THIS MESSAGE WE WERE TOLD TO DELIVER TO RICHARDS...ABOUT SOMETHIN' LIVING AT THE CORE OF THE EARTH.
WE COME FROM ALTERNATE REALITIES. SOME BETTER'N THIS. SOME WORSE.
SO WHY IS RICHARDS A BIG PURPLE THING NOW?
WE ARE WELL AWARE OF THE OTHER REALITIES YOU SPEAK OF, LOGAN.
WHEN SUSAN AND I HAD OUR FIRST CHILD, REED RICHARDS WENT INTO A SORT OF DEPRESSION.
IT WAS SHORT-LIVED. AS WAS RICHARDS.

"FROM WHAT WE UNDERSTAND, THIS REED RICHARDS YOU'VE FACED, KNOWN AS THE BRUTE, ESCAPED TO THIS REALITY BY REACHING IT THROUGH A NETHER-REALM KNOWN AS THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
"WE ASSUME HE KILLED WHAT REMAINED OF THE NEW FANTASTIC FOUR AND TOOK HIS PLACE AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES...AS THIS REALITY'S REED RICHARDS.
"THE BODIES OF SPIDER-MAN, REED AND BEN GRIMM WERE NEVER FOUND."
"S-SPIDER-MAN?"
SOMETIMES LETTIN' THE HURT OUT IS THE BEST WAY TA DEAL WITH THE PAIN, KID.
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A SHOULDER TO CRY ON, LOGAN... H-HE KILLED MY DAD?
AN' ON MY WORLD IT WAS THE SENTINELS THAT GOT HIM, GIRL.
HE BREATHED HIS LAST IN MY ARMS...
...AN' LOOKED AT THE ARMY OF SENTINELS IT TOOK TO BRING HIM DOWN AND MADE A JOKE ABOUT IT TAKING A SWAT TEAM TO STAMP OUT A SPIDER.
YOUR FATHER IS SAFE. REMEMBER THAT. IF ANYTHING, THIS SHOULD JUST MAKE YA A LITTLE MORE GRATEFUL THAT HE IS.
YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THIS, NAMOR.
WE WILL. THANK YOU, LOGAN.
THIS WORLD WILL BE FINE.
THE MONSTER YOU SPEAK OF HAS ALREADY BEEN SLAIN.

GREAT. AS IF THIS WASN'T A TOTAL FAILURE ALREADY!

WHAT ARE ALL THESE WATCHERS HERE FOR? FER ONCE MY 'PUTER HAS SOMETHIN' GOOD TO SAY.
SHOULDN'T THEY BE ON THEIR OWN MOONS?
THEY'RE HERE BECAUSE THEY CAN'T JUST SIT AND WATCH ANYMORE.
I KNOW YOU ARE HERE, ROBOT. I HEAR YOU. YOU HAVE KILLED ME. YOU KNOW THIS NOW, DON'T YOU, ROBOT?
THEY HAVE COME TO KILL ME.

PARADISE X: HERALDS #3

I WASN'T BLAMED FOR ATTEMPTING TO WARN ALL THE ALTERNATE REALITIES OF THE CELESTIAL CHILD THAT GREW AT THE CENTER OF THEIR PLANETS.
I WASN'T HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR USING ALIEN TECHNOLOGY TO EXTRACT HEROES FROM THESE REALMS TO ACT AS AMBASSADORS TO OTHER ALTERNATE WORLDS.
I WASN'T CONVICTED OF THIS CRIME. MY HERALDS WERE NOT BLAMED.
UATU WAS.
UATU, THE OLD BLIND WATCHER WHO HAD GIVEN ME THE SECRETS OF ARTIFICIAL OMNISCIENCE.
UATU, WHO WAS BLINDED AND DEPENDED ON ME TO BE HIS EYES.
UATU, WHO TOLD ME THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS GOOD OR EVIL.
UATU, WHO MUST NOW ACCEPT HIS SENTENCE. THAT WHAT HE DID--OR FAILED TO DO--WAS BAD.
USE YOUR CLAWS, LOGAN!
THAT WOULD BE USELESS...THIS IS ALL NATURAL...I MUST ACCEPT THIS.

I CHOSE X-51 POORLY. I BETRAYED MY PEOPLE.
YOU MEAN YOU INTERFERED WITH HISTORY?
YES, BUT NOT THE WAY YOU ARE IMAGINING.
UATU BROKE THE FIRST RULE OF BEING A WATCHER. HE ALLOWED OUR WORLD TO KNOW THAT IT WAS BEING WATCHED. THIS CHANGED EVERYTHING.
EVEN THE PROCESS OF WATCHING SOMETHING CHANGES IT.
SHORTLY AFTER THE DORMANT CELESTIAL SEEDLING WITH THEM WAS TRIGGERED, THE FANTASTIC FOUR JOURNEYED TO THE MOON.
"I DON'T KNOW WHY UATU CHOSE TO SHOW HIMSELF TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR AT THAT MOMENT...
"...PERHAPS IT WAS THE SIGHT OF THE EVOLVED, MUTATED BEN GRIMM INHABITING THE SAME SPACE AS THE RED GHOST'S APES. ALL OF HUMAN HISTORY WAS REPRESENTED THERE THAT DAY.
"IN ANY EVENT, THE DESTINY OF EARTH CHANGED AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME.
"UATU PRACTICALLY SIGNED THE DEATH WARRANT OF THE CELESTIAL GROWING AT THE PLANET'S CORE...
"...AND INITIATED THE CHARGE TO TAKE THE WARNING OF THE CELESTIAL'S PROPAGATION PLAN TO ALL OF THE ALTERNATE REALITIES.
"AND THAT IS WHY THE WATCHERS ARE HERE. THEY'VE COME TO KILL UATU."

WE CAN'T JUST LET THEM KILL HIM!
THERE IS NO MORALITY TO THE DECISIONS OF MY PEOPLE, GIRL. THERE IS ONLY LIFE AND DEATH.
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE ROBOT, UATU.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. WE CAN ALL SEE THAT X-51 FREED UATU. THE OTHER BIG HEADS AIN'T GONNA LIKE THIS.
YOU TRIFLE WITH THE VERY PURPOSE OF OUR RACE, EARTH-LINGS.
WE ARE DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH YOU.
NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO JUDGE YOU AFTER THIS DAY, UATU. NO ONE.

GIVE ME THE WORD, MACHINE MAN, AND I'LL BLOW THEM TO HELL.
WATCH YOURSELF, STARK. WE NEED THEM. AND WE DON'T KILL FOR THAT MATTER, EITHER.
X-51?
NO, HYPERION. I SAW WHAT YOU DID ON KULAN GATH'S WORLD. I WILL NOT BE PARTY TO GENOCIDE. THERE IS A DIFFERENT WAY.
DO YOU HEAR THAT, UATU?
YOU BELIEVE THIS MAKES YOU BETTER THAN I AM? WE MOVE AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT, ROBOT. YET...A SHOW OF POWER MUST BE MADE.
YOU HAVE NO HOPE OF ESCAPE.
HOW FAST IS THE SPEED OF THOUGHT FOR A RACE THAT ISN'T THINKING AT ALL, UATU?

WHERE ARE WE?
THE CITADEL IS LIKE A MUSEUM OF TIME, ORORO. CERTAIN ERAS ECHO THROUGHOUT. THIS IS THE TIME THE CELESTIALS CAME TO EARTH AND IMPREGNATED THE PLANET.
FEW ESCAPED THEIR MANIPULATIONS.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, LOGAN? HURRY!
SOMETHING... FAMILIAR.
I DON'T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO SAVE THIS GUY, ANYHOW. HE'S JUST SLOWING US DOWN.
WE HAVE TO, IRON MAN, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ALTRUISM, BUT BECAUSE THERE ARE SELFISH REASONS AS WELL.
THINK OF YOUR WORLDS.
UATU HAS SHOWN US HOW TO SAVE THEM. WE CAN'T LET THE WATCHERS KEEP US FROM THAT.

IRONICALLY, IT WASN'T UNTIL THE KING OF THE INHUMANS CAME TO THE MOON TO BLIND UATU THAT THE WATCHER LEARNED WEAKNESS.
KING BOLT BLINDED UATU SO HE WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT BOLT HAD DONE.
CHARLES...
BUT WHY BLIND THE WATCHER?
BECAUSE BLACK BOLT RELEASED THE TERRIGEN MISTS INTO THE AIR...AND THESE ALIEN MISTS TRIGGERED THE MUTANT GENE IN ALL OF MANKIND.
IT'S PART OF THE REASON WHY THE INHUMANS LIVED ON THE SURFACE OF THE MOON.
BLACK BOLT HAD BEEN WATCHING THE WATCHER FOR YEARS.
AND SO UATU'S SECRETS WERE KNOWN AND PASSED DOWN...
...FROM SILENT KING TO SILENT KING.

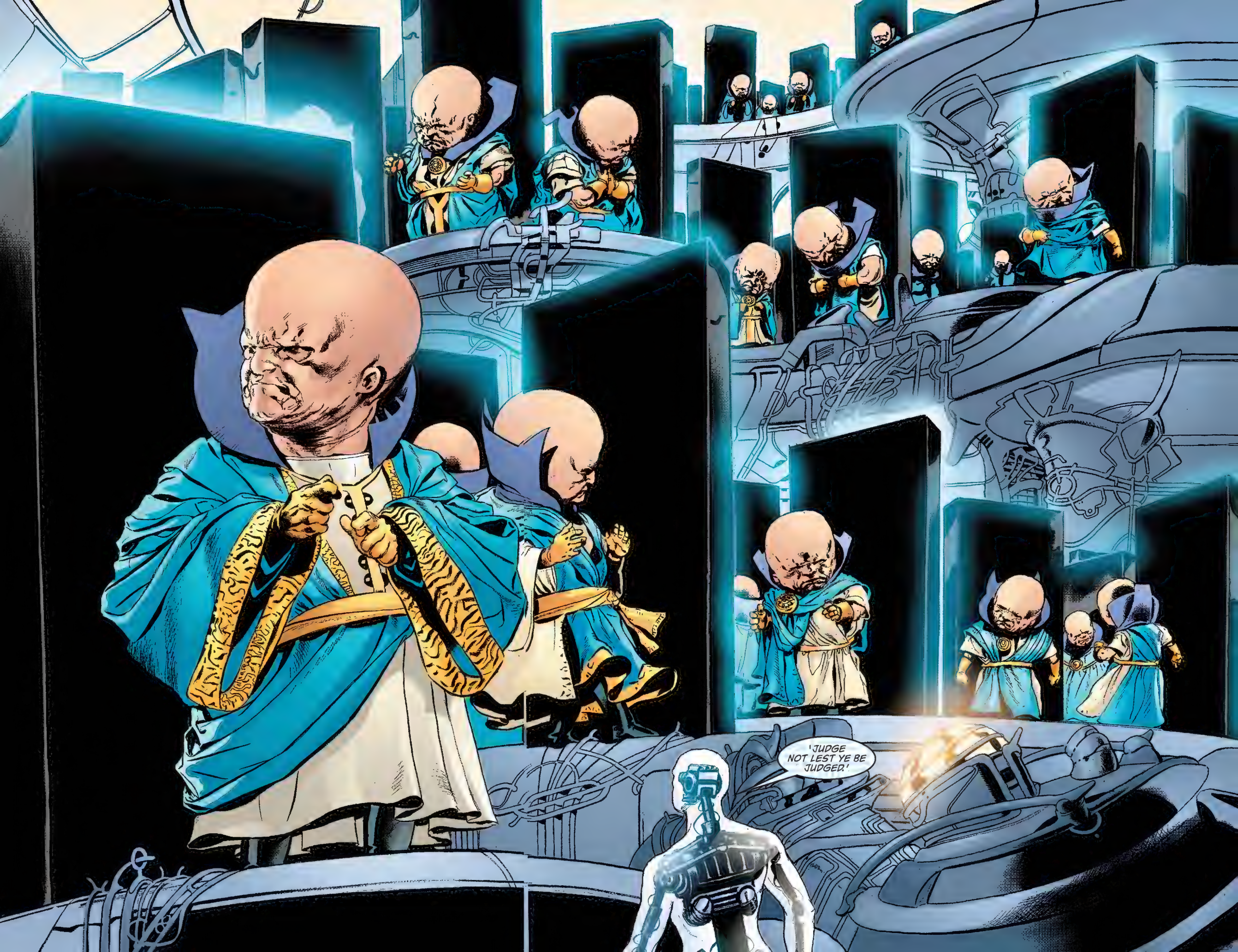
THE KING OF THE INHUMANS COULD NOT HAVE HEARD US, ROBOT.
WE WATCHERS DO NOT SPEAK TO EACH OTHER AUDIBLY.
YOU THINK YOU SEE SO MUCH, UATU...
...BUT THE INHUMAN KING COULD HEAR THOUGHTS, UATU. YOU SHOULDN'T THINK SO LOUDLY.
THEN HE KNEW EVERY-THING.
MORE THAN YOU. ALMOST AS MUCH AS MAR-VELL, I'D WAGER...THOUGH I'M NOT CERTAIN MAR-VELL EVEN SUSPECTED THIS.
THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG, LOGAN. I CAN FEEL IT! SOMETHING TERRI-BLE IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN!
YER SPIDER-SENSE, HUH? I KNOW, KID. I FEEL IT, TOO. IT'S NICE NOT T' BE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S RIGHT ALL THE TIME.

THEY'RE FOLLOWING US!
YOU'RE A FOOL, ROBOT, TO THINK YOU COULD TRICK THEM!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKIN' 'BOUT--'PUTER SAYS THERE AIN'T ANYONE FOLLOWING US!
I CAN'T STAND IT!
I WANT THEM TO FIND US.

WELL, YOU'RE GETTING YOUR WISH, ROBOT.
YOUR RUN THROUGH HISTORY HAS COME TO AN END.
ACCEPT YOUR PLACE WITHIN IT.
HEY!
HEY, WE'RE TRYING TO SAVE YOUR BUTT, UATU. REMEMBER THAT?

I HOPE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, AARON!
YEAH! I KNEW YA WOULDN'T FERGET ABOUT US, KILLRAVEN! I JUST DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D HAVE THE WILLPOWER TO LEAVE THAT WARRIOR BABE!
I HATE ALIENS, DEATHLOK. ALL OF THEM.
WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
YOU'RE WONDERING HOW MUCH UATU REVEALED TO ME, AREN'T YOU?
ABOUT THIS PLACE? ABOUT THE WATCHERS? ABOUT THE CELESTIALS?
EVERY-THING.

TRY TO STOP US. DO YOUR WORST. A SHOW OF POWER MUST BE MADE.
YOU THINK YOU'RE STILL DEALING WITH APES HERE.
YOU'VE FORGOTTEN THE FIRST RULE OF JUDGING, WATCHERS.


'JUDGE NOT LEST YE BE JUDGED.'

YOU CAN COME OUT NOW.
X-51... WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
I'VE SAVED YOU, HATU. YOU AND EVERY WORLD UPON WHICH YOUR PEOPLE BORE WITNESS.
IT WASN'T REED RICHARDS AT ALL...

YOU WERE BEING JUDGED FOR REVEALING YOURSELF TO HUMANITY, UATU. YOU WERE BEING JUDGED FOR SAVING MANKIND.
WH-WHAT?
THE REVELATION OF YOUR EXISTENCE SET OFF A SERIES OF EVENTS THAT LED TO THE DISCOVERY OF MANKIND'S TRUE PURPOSE IN THE CELESTIAL SCHEME.
YOU SURE YOU WANT HIM PLUGGED IN AGAIN, AARON?
OF COURSE. YOU SEE, I'D THOUGHT IT WAS REED RICHARDS ALONE WHO HELD THE KEY TO EACH WORLD'S SALVATION FROM THE CELESTIAL THAT GREW AT ITS CORE.
BUT I WAS WRONG. IT WASN'T JUST REED. IT WAS HUMANITY. OUR CURIOSITY. OUR IMAGINATION.
ALL WE NEEDED TO KNOW WAS THAT WE WERE BEING WATCHED.
WHAT YOU MEANT FOR EVIL, WAS INSTEAD USED FOR GOOD, UATU. YOU WERE OUR ENEMY, BUT UNKNOWINGLY BECAME OUR GREATEST ALLY.
AND THAT IS WHAT THE WATCHERS HAVE NOW BECOME.

"ON ONE EARTH, A WORLD OVERRUN BY ALIEN SKRULLS, THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WATCHERS IS GIVEN TO THE O-MEN.
"ONE DAY, I EXPECT BOB GRAYSON, WHO WAS ONCE KNOWN AS MARVEL BOY, TO LEAD THE CHARGE AGAINST THE CELESTIAL AT THE EARTH'S CORE.
"IF NOT GRAYSON, THEN THE CHANDLER BROTHERS FOR CERTAIN... YOU KNOW, 3-D MAN.
"ON ANOTHER EARTH, IT WAS NOT THE RICHARDS CLAN WHO BECAME THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND LED THE WAR AGAINST THE CELESTIALS."
HEY, BOSS-MAN! TELL ME THIS AIN'T ANOTHER ONE OF THEM IDEAS YER GONNA GET ALL THE CREDIT FOR.
ONCE AGAIN, GENERAL FURY, YOU'VE SAVED EARTH.
I DON'T NEED YER MEDALS, SIR...BUT THANK YOU ALL THE SAME, MR. PRESIDENT.
"ON YET ANOTHER EARTH, THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WATCHERS IS GIVEN TO NICHOLAS FURY AND STEVE ROGERS.
"AND A NEW BATTLE BEGINS, SOLDIERED BY MEN WHO HAD FOUGHT WARS THEIR ENTIRE LIVES."

"FOR EVERY WORLD WHERE THERE WAS A WATCHER STATIONED...
"...FOR EVERY ALTERNATIVE HISTORY CREATED BY THE TIME MANIPULATIONS OF MEPHISTO...
"...FOR EVERY HUMANITY THAT DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS BEING WATCHED, A WATCHER WAS SENT."
SO THERE IS NO ONE TO JUDGE YOU ANYMORE, UATU. THEY ALL ARE GUILTY OF WHAT THEY BLAME YOU FOR.
YOU ARE NOW FREE TO DO MORE THAN WATCH. WILL YOU HELP ME...
...WILL YOU HELP US?

THIS... THIS IS YOUR EARTH?
PART OF IT. THIS IS ATTILAN, ONCE THE HOME OF THE INHUMANS. IT WAS ABANDONED LONG AGO.
THIS IS MY WORLD. YOU'LL FIND ALL THE THINGS I PROMISED YOU ON THIS PLANET.
SMELLS BETTER'N ANYWHERE I'VE BEEN IN A LONG TIME. THE X-MEN ARE HERE. ALIVE. I KNOW THEY ARE.
THANK YOU, AARON. I CAN NEVER THANK YOU ENOUGH.
I KNOW, 'PUTER. THIS ISN'T EARTH BY A LONGSHOT!
VAMPIRISM IS A BLOOD DISEASE, ORORO. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER ORORO ON THIS EARTH...ONE WHO, THROUGH A BLOOD TRANSFUSION, MIGHT BE THE ANSWER TO CURING YOUR DISEASE.
YOUR FATHER IS IN NEW YORK, MAY. HE'S A POLICEMAN.
MY DAD'S A COP? COOL.
THERE ARE TRAVELERS, KILLRAVEN... WHO COME FROM THE FUTURE OF THE EARTH THAT WAS OVERCOME BY MARTIANS. THEY VISIT HERE OFTEN.
THEY MAY HAVE LEFT EVIDENCE HERE OF WHAT HAPPENED TOWARDS THE END OF YOUR WAR WITH THE MARTIANS.
FOR YOU, ARNO, THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT FROM UNDER YOUR UNCLE'S SHADOW CAN FINALLY BEGIN.
HERE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF.
DON'T SAY ANYTHING. I DON'T WANT MY BETTER HALF TO KNOW WHAT I'M PLANNING.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I'LL TELL YOU LATER.
WHAT ABOUT HIM?

I HAD HOPED, HYPERION, THAT YOUR WISHES WOULD HAVE CHANGED BY NOW.
THEY HAVE NOT.
HYPERION JOINED OUR TASK FORCE FOR A SPECIFIC PIECE OF KNOWLEDGE...
...THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION HE'S ASKED SINCE THE REST OF THE SQUADRON SUPREME WERE KILLED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE THEY HAD SWORN TO PROTECT.
HE WANTS TO KNOW HOW TO DIE.
HE WANTS TO KNOW HOW TO KILL A SUPERMAN.

PARADISE X : 0

I REMEMBER THIS STREET. THIS IS WHERE MOM AND I LIVED.
THAT'S WHERE I WENT TO SCHOOL.
AND WHERE I KISSED PAT.
AND THAT'S WHERE...
...I JUST DON'T REMEMBER IT BEING THIS NEW... OR ALIVE.
THEY WON'T REMEMBER ME. THEY WON'T RECOGNIZE... WAIT, WHAT AM I TALKING ABOUT?
DON'T FOOL YOURSELF, STEVE.
YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE THIS NAÏVE.
YOU WEREN'T BORN YESTERDAY.
IN FACT, AT THIS POINT, YOU HAVEN'T BEEN BORN AT ALL.

HELLO?
WHO ARE YOU?
YEAH?
I...I...I'M HERE FOR THE ROOM. I SAW THE SIGN.
WHO ARE YOU?
WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT LEAVING YOUR ROOM, MATTHEW? YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT WELL ENOUGH!
BUT MOM, HE SAYS HE'S ...:KAFF:... HERE FOR THE ROOM.
MOM? THEN THIS KID... IS MY...MY BROTHER?
BUT I NEVER HAD A BROTHER.
MOM? WHAT'S GOING ON?
A SERVICEMAN?!
I'M NOT SURE WE C'N CHARGE YOU RENT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE. WE'RE A GOOD CHRISTIAN FAMILY, MR...?
YOU CAN CALL ME STEVE.

STEVE, THEN. THAT'S A GOOD NAME, STEVE.
WE'VE ONLY BEEN IN THIS BUILDING FOR A FEW YEARS, STEVE. WE'RE IMMIGRANTS. FROM DUBLIN. IRISH.
SO AM I, SIR. IRISH, I MEAN.
I KNEW YE WERE A FIGHTER. TELL ME ABOUT THE WAR.
TELL US 'BOUT YOUR LIFE AS A SOLDIER.
THAT'S A LONG STORY, SIR. SOMETIMES, IT FELT LIKE THE WAR WAS NEVER GOING TO END... SOMETIMES I'M NOT SO CERTAIN IT HAS.
I'M SORRY, I'M NOT SURE WHAT TYPE OF TEA THIS IS, BUT IT'S ALL WE HAVE.
HOW ON EARTH AM I GOING TO TELL THEM WHO I AM?
HOW DO I TELL THEM THEY'RE DEAD AND THIS IS ALL A MEMORY'S ECHO?
HOW DO I EXPLAIN THIS TO THEM?
HOW DO I TELL A FATHER I NEVER KNEW THAT I UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE NATURE OF LIFE THAN HE DOES?
HOW DO I TELL A BROTHER I CAN ONLY ASSUME DIED BEFORE I WAS BORN THAT HE'S ALREADY DEAD?
AND HOW DO I CONVINCE MY MOTHER, OF ALL PEOPLE, THAT PARADISE AWAITS HER... BUT ONLY IF SHE CAN ACCEPT THE REALITY OF HER EXISTENCE?

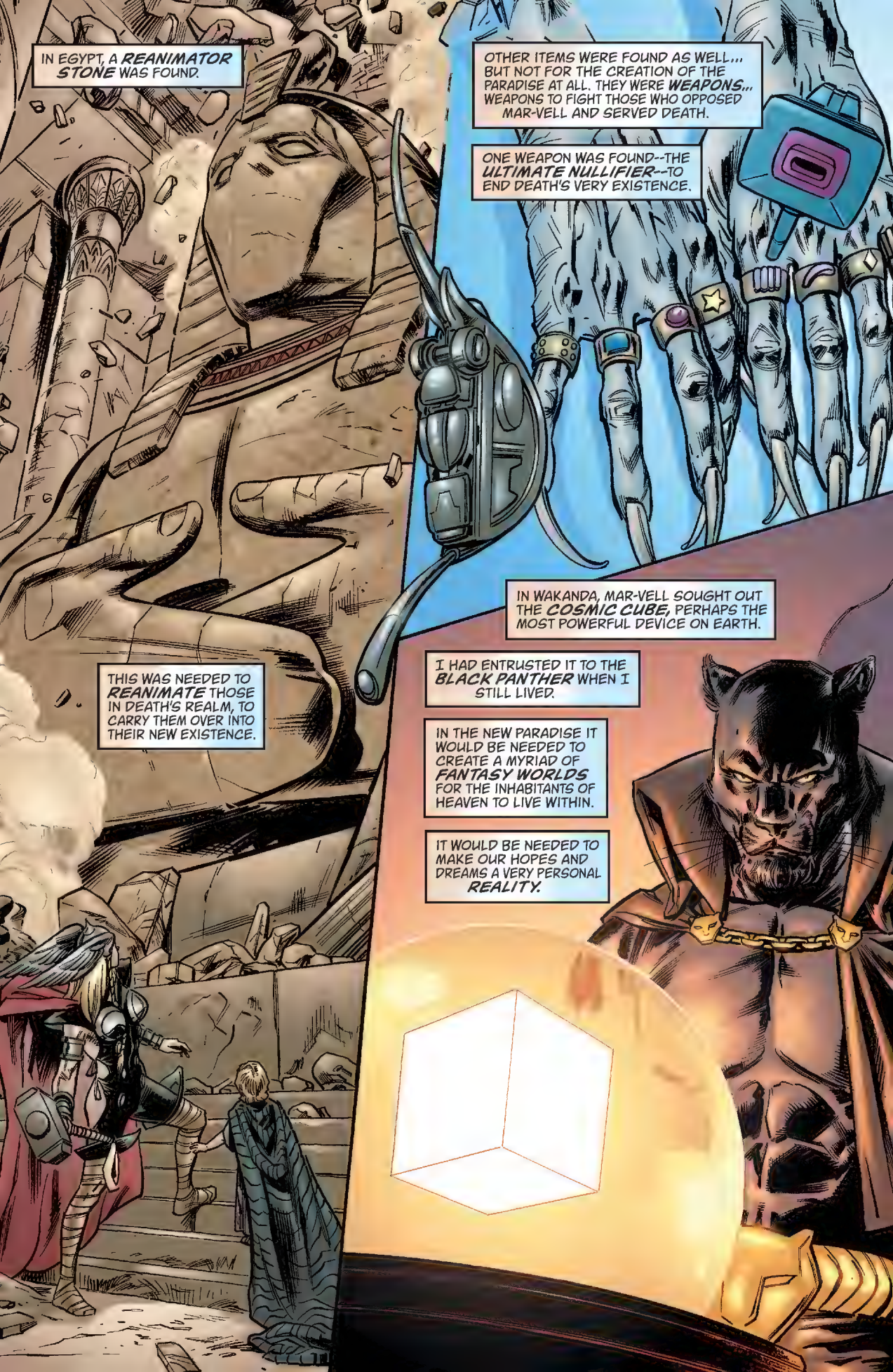
IT MUST BE AMAZING TO SEE OTHER LANDS.
I'VE WALKED SO MANY SHORES...SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S REAL ANYMORE. SOMETIMES I WONDER IF I EVEN HAVE A HOME AT ALL.
I SUPPOSE WAR CHANGES A MAN, STEVE. IT CHANGES YOUR VIEW OF THE THINGS YOU PROTECT.
COME NOW, BOY. THIS SHOULD BE A HAPPY TIME. YOU LIVED THROUGH THE WAR...
I DON'T KNOW... I THINK WE'RE ALL CASUALTIES IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
WE DON'T KNOW WHO OR WHAT WE ARE UNTIL WE'RE PUT INTO HOT WATER...
...BUT IN THE END, WE ALL LOSE OUR FLAVOR.
I NEED TO GATHER MY THINGS. I'LL COME BACK THIS EVENING.
THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING A ROOM FOR ME... WITH YOUR FAMILY.

HOW? HOW DO I MAKE THEM REMEMBER?
I TOLD THEM ONCE THAT THIS IS THE WORLD OF GHOSTS...THE REALM OF THE DEAD.
BUT THIS THOUGHT, THIS IDEA, WAS LIKE A BIRD...AND COULD NOT BE CAGED.
WHAT, MOTHER? WHAT MUST I DO FOR YOU TO BELIEVE ME? WHAT MUST I SAY TO SHOW YOU WE'VE DIED AND HAVE A NEW LIFE WAITING FOR US?
WHAT MUST I BECOME?
IT WON'T BE HEAVEN WITHOUT YOU.

BUT IS IT HEAVEN AT ALL?
I THOUGHT MAR-VELL'S QUEST TO COLLECT THE GREATEST SOURCES OF POWER ON EARTH WAS TO CREATE A WEAPON TO DEFEAT DEATH...
...BUT IT WASN'T. THEY WERE BEING COLLECTED TO CREATE A HEAVEN AFTER THE END OF DEATH.
THERE ARE THREE REALMS OR DIMENSIONS THAT I AM NOW AWARE OF...
...THERE IS THE LAND OF THE LIVING, THE REALM OF THE DEAD WHERE MY PARENTS ARE STILL IMPRISONED BY THEIR MEMORIES, AND THE NEWLY CREATED PARADISE.
WHOEVER HEARD OF A PARADISE THAT COULD BE BUILT BY THE INHABITANTS OF HELL?
WHOEVER HEARD OF AN EDEN ASSEMBLED FROM WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION?

WHEN I LIVED...LIVED IN THAT OTHER REALM...I WAS CHARGED WITH PROTECTING THE REINCARNATED CAPTAIN MAR-VELL IN HIS QUEST FOR THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION THAT STILL EXISTED ON EARTH.
I HAD FOOLISHLY BELIEVED THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE LIVING. IT WASN'T. THIS WAS FOR THE DEAD.
IN ENGLAND, IN A PLACE OF ANCIENT POWER AND TRUE MYTH, WE FOUND EVEN OLDER BOOKS HOLDING THE SECRETS OF ILLUSION AND DELUSION...
...TO CREATE THE IMAGES OF OUR LOST HUMANITY IN THE PARADISE.
THERE WERE ALLIES EVERYWHERE IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING.
AND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD, IN A PLACE CALLED THE SAVAGE LAND, ANTI-METAL WAS COLLECTED TO BUILD THE FRAMEWORK FOR A PARADISE THAT WOULD BE CREATED IN A FIELD OF ANTI-MATTER.

IN JAPAN, WE FOUND THE EYE AND ORB OF AGAMOTTO. THESE WERE ARTIFICIAL AIDS OF KNOWLEDGE UNTIL ALL THE PIECES OF OMNISCIENCE COULD BE LOCATED.
AND THEY WERE TAKEN SO NONE OF DEATH'S AGENTS ON EARTH COULD KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE AFTERLIFE.
IN FLORIDA, WE--I MEAN MAR-VELL, THOR, THE X-MEN AND ALL THE OTHER HEROES THAT RALLIED AROUND MY DEATH--FOUND A DEVICE CAPABLE OF OVERWHELMING ALL WITHIN ITS PERIMETER WITH SPECIFIED EMOTIONS.
IN THE SOUTHWEST, THE DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY WAS OUR NEXT OBJECT OF POWER. I DIED IN THE ACQUISITION OF THIS DEVICE.
WE NEEDED THE DOORWAY TO TRANSPORT ALL THOSE FROM DEATH'S REALM TO THE NEW PARADISE...
...ALL THOSE WHO WERE WILLING TO COME, WHO HAD THE COURAGE AND WILLINGNESS TO LOOK AT THEIR LIVES AND ADMIT THEY WERE ALREADY DEAD.
THERE ARE NO TEARS IN HEAVEN. THAT'S WHAT MAR-VELL SAID. THIS DEVICE WOULD HELP SOME ACCEPT THE NEW REALITY...UNTIL THEIR OWN JOY COULD ASSERT ITSELF.


IN EGYPT, A REANIMATOR STONE WAS FOUND.
THIS WAS NEEDED TO REANIMATE THOSE IN DEATH'S REALM, TO CARRY THEM OVER INTO THEIR NEW EXISTENCE.
OTHER ITEMS WERE FOUND AS WELL... BUT NOT FOR THE CREATION OF THE PARADISE AT ALL. THEY WERE WEAPONS... WEAPONS TO FIGHT THOSE WHO OPPOSED MAR-VELL AND SERVED DEATH.
ONE WEAPON WAS FOUND--THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER--TO END DEATH'S VERY EXISTENCE.
IN WAKANDA, MAR-VELL SOUGHT OUT THE COSMIC CUBE, PERHAPS THE MOST POWERFUL DEVICE ON EARTH.
I HAD ENTRUSTED IT TO THE BLACK PANTHER WHEN I STILL LIVED.
IN THE NEW PARADISE IT WOULD BE NEEDED TO CREATE A MYRIAD OF FANTASY WORLDS FOR THE INHABITANTS OF HEAVEN TO LIVE WITHIN.
IT WOULD BE NEEDED TO MAKE OUR HOPES AND DREAMS A VERY PERSONAL REALITY.

ON WUNDAGORE MOUNTAIN, MAR-VELL CAME UPON A DEVICE TO CREATE MEN FROM ANIMALS.
TO MAR-VELL, IT WAS A WAY TO EVOLVE CADAVERS INTO ANGELS, TO CHANGE GHOSTS INTO SOMETHING HIGHER AND MORE PROFOUND.
IN THE END, THERE WERE YET TWO PIECES THAT WERE REQUIRED TO DEFEAT DEATH AND ESTABLISH THE NEW PARADISE...
...THE FINAL PIECE OF OMNISCIENCE, SOMETHING THAT HAD BEEN SCATTERED THROUGHOUT CREATION.
THE FINAL PIECE WAS FOUND RESTING IN THE VISION OF A LOCAL HERO.
WHEN COMPLETE, MAR-VELL KNEW EVERYTHING. HOW TO DEFEAT DEATH. HOW TO BUILD HEAVEN.
HOW TO COMMAND THE POWER COSMIC ITSELF. THE OTHER MISSING PIECE. ALL THAT WAS NECESSARY.
HOW TO BE GOD.
HOW TO SAVE SOULS.

I WAS ONCE CAPTAIN AMERICA. ONCE STEVE ROGERS. A MAN. A SON.
A LIVING LEGEND.
A REPRESENTATION OF A DREAM.
A DREAM GREAT MEN SHARED AND DIED TO ESTABLISH.
A DREAM THAT EBBED AND FLOWED WITH THE FREEDOMS OF ITS PEOPLE.
A DREAM THAT NEVER QUITE TOOK FULL FORM.
TO THINK THAT I HAVE NOW BECOME THE DREAM.
THERE...
...ULTIMATE FREEDOM.
EVERYTHING AMERICA POINTED TO COMES TOGETHER HERE.

PARADISE.

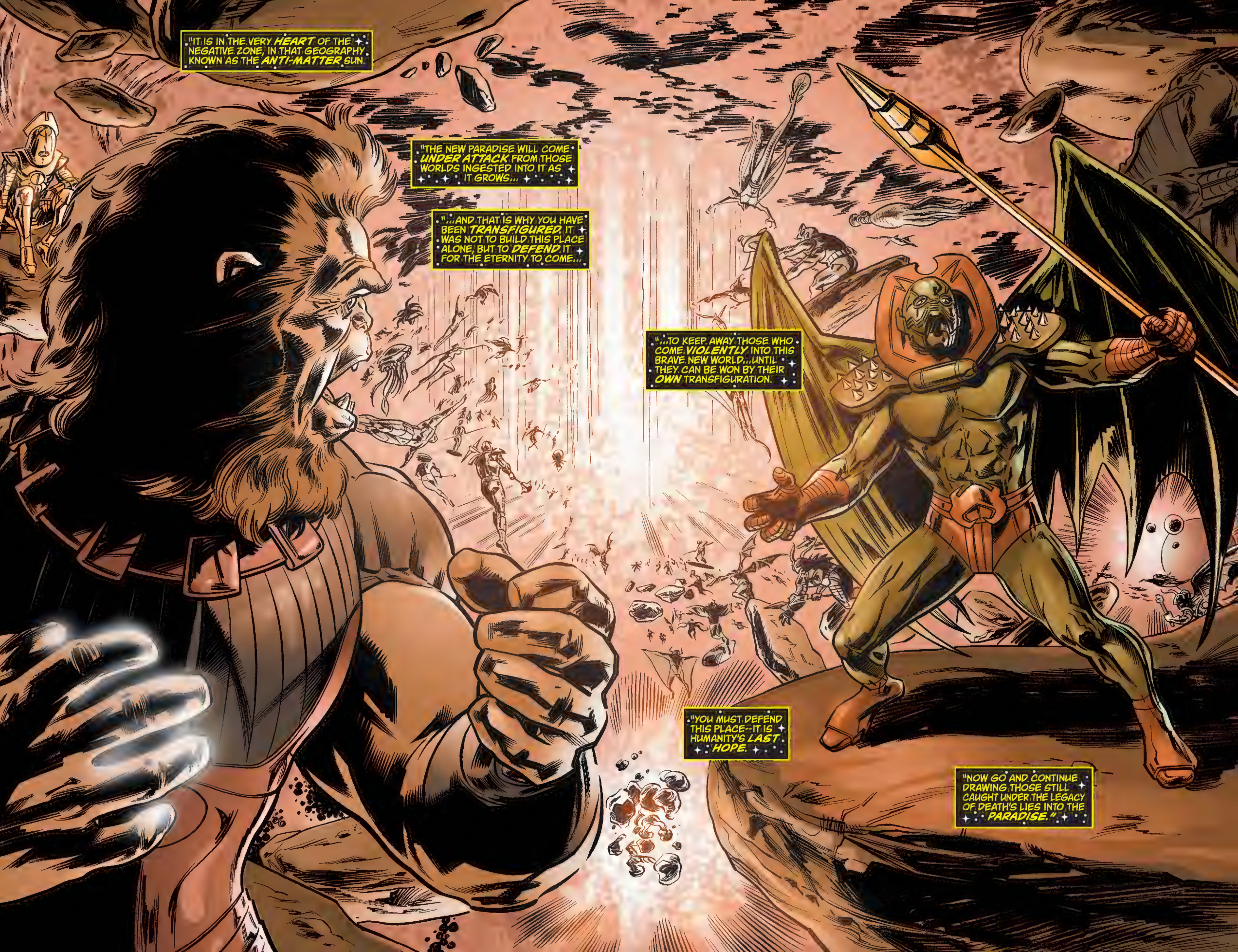
STEVE.
JIM... BUCKY.
ARE YOU READY?
ARE YOU KIDDING? I WAS BORN FOR THIS, STEVE.
I KNOW, BUCKY.
WE ALL WERE.

IT'S JUST SO UNFAIR, STEVE.
IT ALL STINKS TO...
...HIGH HEAVEN?
I'M SORRY, STEVE, BUT IT ROTS. YOU OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD GET TO ENTER HEAVEN. YOU DESERVE IT. YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH. SAVED SO MANY.
HOW CAN I GO OFF TO GLORY AND KNOW IT'S ONLY POSSIBLE BECAUSE YOU'RE HERE MAKING SURE I'M SAFE? HOW CAN ANY OF US HAVE PEACE KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE...
FREEDOM HAS A PRICE, BUCKY.
BUT I DIDN'T ASK YOU TO PAY IT...YOU DESERVE THIS MORE THAN I DO.
AND THAT'S WHY HE'S BEEN CHOSEN, JIM. WHO ELSE WOULD YOU TRUST TO PROTECT HEAVEN?
BUT DON'T WORRY, KID, HE'S NOT GOING TO DO IT ALONE...

ROGERS IS ONLY ONE OF SEVEN GUARDIANS OF THE PARADISE.
THE TIME HAS COME. THE DOOR IS ABOUT TO OPEN.
WHAT DOOR, MATT?
THIS ONE, ULYSSES.
THERE ONCE WAS A DAY WHEN IT SEEMED AS IF THERE WAS NO TIME AT ALL...WHEN THE EARTH WAS YOUNG. THAT WAS A GOOD DAY.
AND IT WILL BE AGAIN. WELL SAID, GENERAL BLOOD-STONE.
EVERYONE WILL GET HIS TURN...YOU'VE WAITED THIS LONG.
REMEMBER, TIME HAS BECOME AN OUTMODED NOTION.

WHAT AM I EATING?
A SHARD OF THE COSMIC CUBE. YOUR PIECE OF THE NEW HEAVEN.
I DON'T CARE WHAT THEY SAY. IT'S NOT REAL.
SHUT YOUR MOUTH, JIGSAW. MURDOCK'S EARS WERE BAD ENOUGH BEFORE HE WALKED IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS.
THE REALM OF THE DEAD, THEN...HOW DO WE GET THERE?
IDIOT. WE ARE HERE ONLY BECAUSE WE HAVE ACCEPTED OUR DEATHS. USE YOUR WILL. DENY THIS STATE.
"BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE ALIVE AND WE WILL RETURN TO THAT PURGATORY OF THE DEAD."

I AM SORRY, MY FRIENDS. I KNOW YOU WOULD ALL LIKE TO GO TO YOUR REWARD...
...BUT THERE ARE STILL MANY IN DEATH'S REALM THAT YOU NEED TO BRING HERE. YOU NEED TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT THIS PLACE EXISTS.
BUT YOU ARE FAR MORE THAN AMBASSADORS TO THE DEAD. THERE ARE FORCES THAT DESIRE THE PARADISE DESTROYED.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND, MAR-VELL...BOTH HERO AND VILLAIN ALIKE ARE HERE. WHO WOULD WANT TO SEE A PLACE LIKE THIS HARMED?
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO KNOW EVERYTHING.
WHERE IS HEAVEN, MAR-VELL?

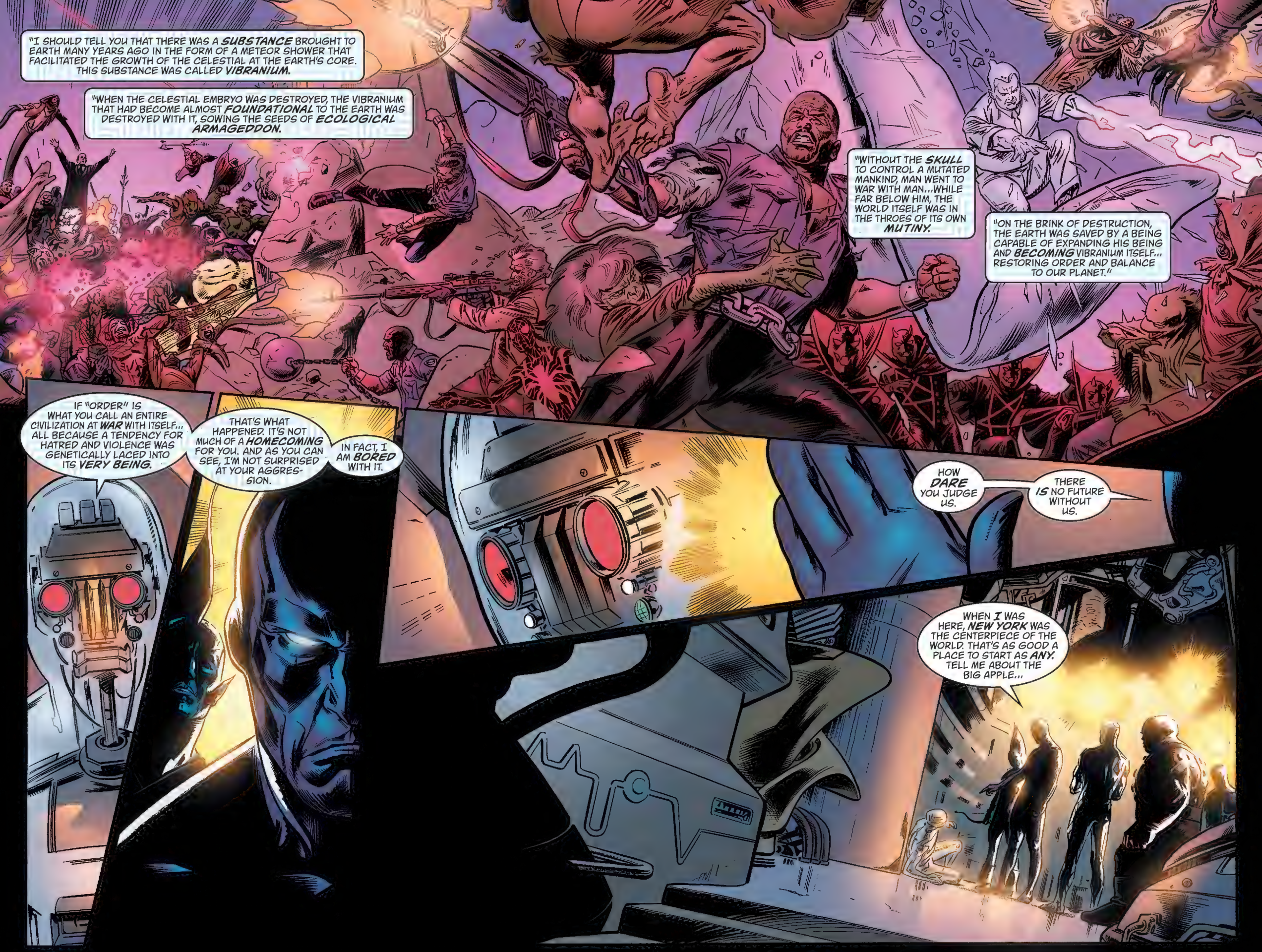

"IT IS IN THE VERY HEART OF THE NEGATIVE ZONE, IN THAT GEOGRAPHY KNOWN AS THE ANTI-MATTER SUN.
"THE NEW PARADISE WILL COME UNDER ATTACK FROM THOSE WORLDS INGESTED INTO IT AS IT GROWS...
"...AND THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN TRANSFIGURED. IT WAS NOT TO BUILD THIS PLACE ALONE, BUT TO DEFEND IT FOR THE ETERNITY TO COME...
"...TO KEEP AWAY THOSE WHO COME VIOLENTLY INTO THIS BRAVE NEW WORLD...UNTIL THEY CAN BE WON BY THEIR OWN TRANSFIGURATION.
"YOU MUST DEFEND THIS PLACE--IT IS HUMANITY'S LAST HOPE.
"NOW GO AND CONTINUE DRAWING THOSE STILL CAUGHT UNDER THE LEGACY OF DEATH'S LIES INTO THE PARADISE."

"IT'S NO USE...I AM ONLY A WATCHMAN.
"I HAVE NO WEAPONS."
THERE IS NO ONE ELSE HERE APART FROM MYSELF, ONE OF EARTH'S RETIRED DEFENDERS, AND AN OLD, BLIND ALIEN.
SHUT YOUR HOLE, SEE-THROUGHP10.
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE. WHAT HAPPENED TO MY HOME?
A FITTING CHOICE OF WORDS.
WHAT?
HELL.
BECAUSE HELL HAPPENED HERE.

YOU HEAR WHAT IT TOLD THE MAJOR, ROCKHEAD?
SHUT UP.
THE HERALDS HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED TO EARTH, X-51? I HEARD VOICES...
WAS THAT WISE, MAJOR?
SURE.
SHOW CAUTION, MAJOR. LET US NOT CONFUSE OUR ENEMIES WITH OUR ALLIES.
FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, WE HAVE NO ALLIES APART FROM OURSELVES. TALK TO ME, ROBOT. WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THIS PLACE IN THE LAST 30 YEARS?
THE PRISMATIC BEING OBVIOUSLY HAS PARTIAL CONTROL OVER ME... FORCING ME TO ACCESS KNOWLEDGE I WOULD OTHERWISE NOT MAKE AVAILABLE TO THEM.

"THE KING OF THE INHUMANS, BLACK BOLT, MUTATED THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF EARTH TO PROTECT HIS WANDERING PEOPLE FROM BECOMING THE OBJECTS OF ANTI-MUTANT BIGOTRY AND VIOLENCE.
"WHEN HE DID, HE TRIGGERED A DESTINY FOR MANKIND THAT DATED BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF TIME, TO THE POINT OF HUMANITY'S EARLIEST STEPS UPON THE PLANET.
"IN AN EFFORT TO FREE HIS PEOPLE, BOLT ENSLAVED ALMOST HALF THE HEROES OF THE WORLD.
"THE DESTINY I MENTIONED INCLUDED A CHILD BEING RAISED, WHOSE MUTANT POWER ALLOWED HIM TO CONTROL EVERY OTHER MUTANT ON THE EARTH.
"THIS CHILD WAS KNOWN AS THE SKULL."

"THE SKULL'S PURPOSE WAS ONE OF GENETIC AND GENERATIONAL DESIGN. ONCE HUMANITY WAS MUTATED, THE SKULL'S POWER WAS TRIGGERED.
"THE SKULL'S POWER SERVED TWO PURPOSES. ONE, IT ALLOWED FOR THE NEW POWER-INEBRIATED MANKIND TO BE CONTROLLED AND KEPT FROM DESTROYING ITS WORLD IN THE PROCESS.
"TWO, IT SENT A CALL TO THE BEINGS WHO FIRST INTENDED THE MUTATION OF MANKIND FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN PROCREATION."
"BUT WHY PROTECT THE PLANET? WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH THEIR OWN PROCREATION?"
"THE PLANET IS AN EGG. HUMANITY WAS MUTATED TO PROTECT THE EARTH...TO ACT AS GUARDIANS FROM OUTSIDE INVASION. ANTIBODIES FROM INTER-GALACTIC INFECTION.
"THAT'S WHY SUPER HEROES EXIST. THAT'S THE ONLY REASON.
"WE TOPPLED OUR GODS AND ABORTED THEIR ATTEMPT TO DESTROY ALL LIFE ON THE PLANET FOR THE SAKE OF THAT WHICH LIVED WITHIN IT."


"I SHOULD TELL YOU THAT THERE WAS A SUBSTANCE BROUGHT TO EARTH MANY YEARS AGO IN THE FORM OF A METEOR SHOWER THAT FACILITATED THE GROWTH OF THE CELESTIAL AT THE EARTH'S CORE. THIS SUBSTANCE WAS CALLED VIBRANIUM.
"WHEN THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO WAS DESTROYED, THE VIBRANIUM THAT HAD BECOME ALMOST FOUNDATIONAL TO THE EARTH WAS DESTROYED WITH IT, SOWING THE SEEDS OF ECOLOGICAL ARMAGEDDON.
"WITHOUT THE SKULL TO CONTROL A MUTATED MANKIND, MAN WENT TO WAR WITH MAN...WHILE FAR BELOW HIM, THE WORLD ITSELF WAS IN THE THROES OF ITS OWN MUTINY.
"ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION, THE EARTH WAS SAVED BY A BEING CAPABLE OF EXPANDING HIS BEING AND BECOMING VIBRANIUM ITSELF... RESTORING ORDER AND BALANCE TO OUR PLANET."
IF "ORDER" IS WHAT YOU CALL AN ENTIRE CIVILIZATION AT WAR WITH ITSELF... ALL BECAUSE A TENDENCY FOR HATRED AND VIOLENCE WAS GENETICALLY LACED INTO ITS VERY BEING.
THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED. IT'S NOT MUCH OF A HOMECOMING FOR YOU. AND AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M NOT SURPRISED AT YOUR AGGRES-SION.
IN FACT, I AM BORED WITH IT.
HOW DARE YOU JUDGE US.
THERE IS NO FUTURE WITHOUT US.
WHEN I WAS HERE, NEW YORK WAS THE CENTERPIECE OF THE WORLD. THAT'S AS GOOD A PLACE TO START AS ANY. TELL ME ABOUT THE BIG APPLE...

"BIG ADAM'S APPLE IS MORE LIKE IT. LOOK AT THE SCREEN."
"MY GOD...THAT'S NEW YORK? WHAT YEAR IS THIS?"

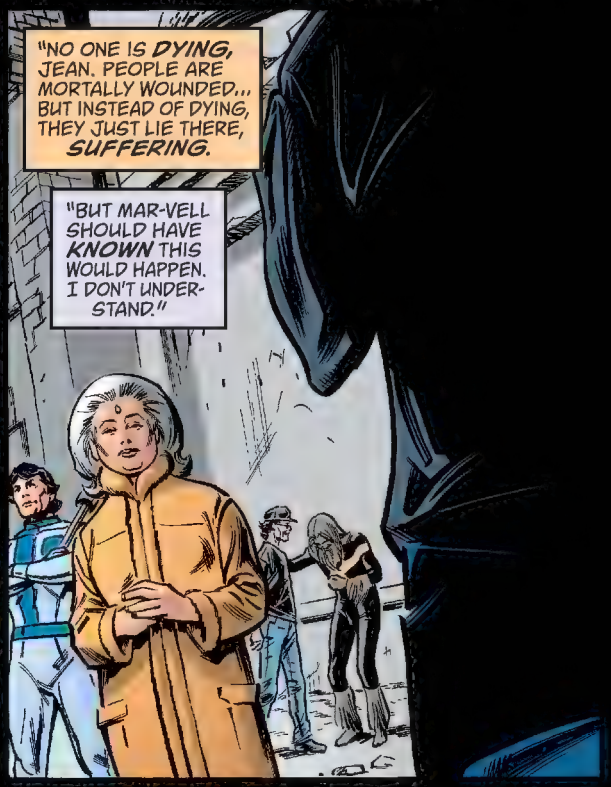
"SCOTT?
"SCOTT, CAN YOU HEAR ME?"
"JEAN? I'M KIND OF BUSY DISCOVERING THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION THAT HAS PLAGUED HUMANITY SINCE THE DAWN OF SUPER HEROES..."
"DO TELL."
"WHO'S STRONGER--THE THING OR THE HULK?"
GO HULK, GO!
YOU C'N DO IT, JADE JAWS!
MY OWN BLOOD BETRAYS ME!
I SWEAR, ALICIA, YA SCARLET PIMPERNELLA, I'M CONVINCED I AIN'T THE FATHER A' THESE TWO!
WHAT WERE YA DOIN' EVERY TIME I GOT MY TENDER BRICK-PLATED BOOTY KICKED INTA THE NEGATIVE ZONE, ANYWAY?

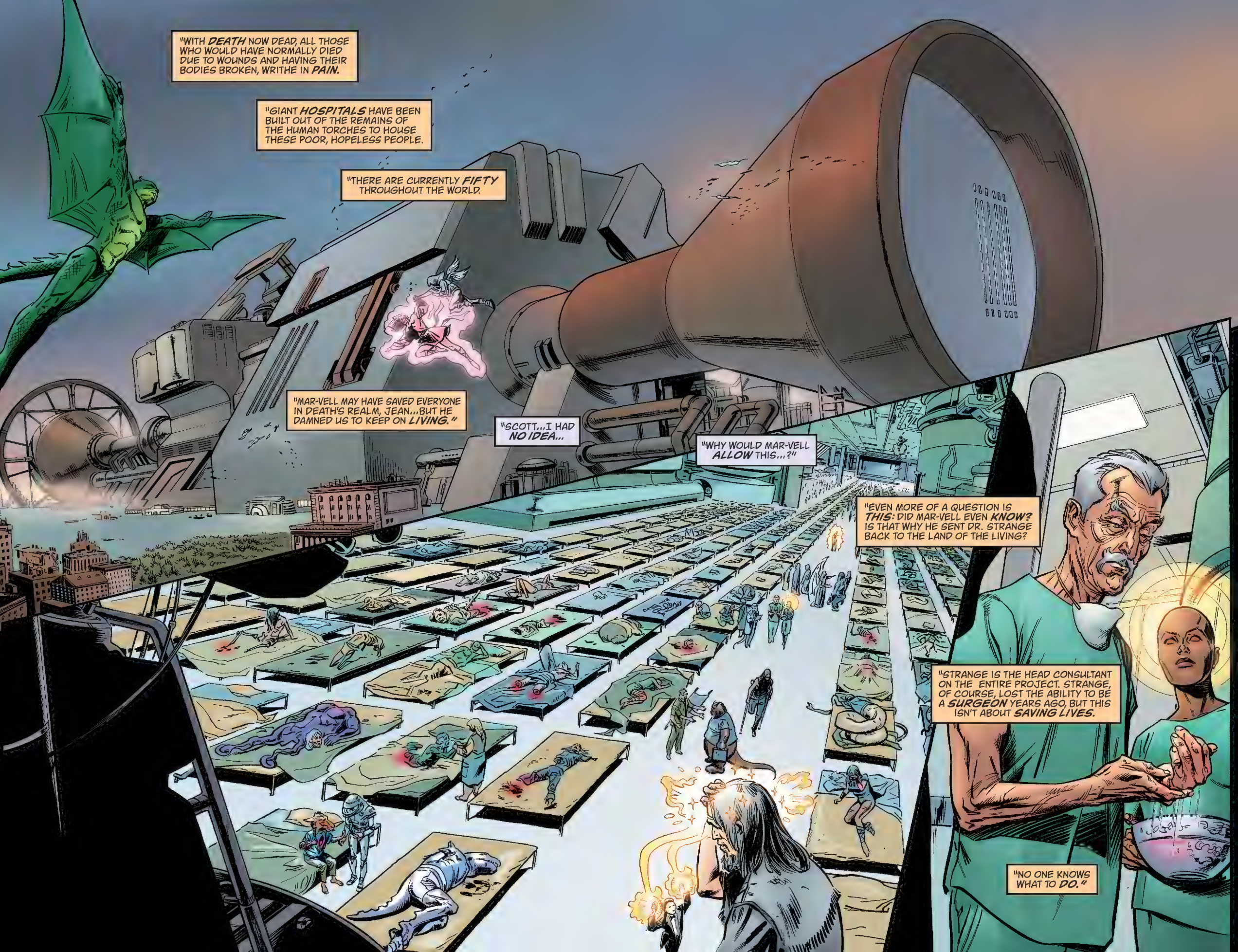
"I DON'T THINK I COULD TAKE ONE MORE REVELATION, SCOTT. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.
"THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COSMIC CUBE HAS BEGUN. THE PARADISE'S EXPANSION IS IMMINENT.
"THE TRUTH IS, I HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE... SOMETHING DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT.
"I NEED TO SEE WHAT YOU'VE SEEN, SCOTT. I NEED YOU TO OPEN YOUR MIND COMPLETELY TO ME...BEYOND THE PSYCHIC RAPPORT THAT STILL EXISTS BETWEEN THE NEW PARADISE AND THE REALM OF THE LIVING."
THERE AIN'T NO WAY I'M LETTIN' SOME HAS-BEEN IN DIAPERS BEAT ME! I GOTTA HAVE SOME RESPECT. IF NOT FROM MY CHILDREN, THEN AT LEAST FROM MY OLD BUDDY, REED!
JUST DON'T DROP ANYTHING, BEN.
CRIPES. NOT YOU, TOO.
I GOT IT... HEY, BANNER, AIN'T IT TIME FER YER NAP?
"CAN YOU FEEL HOW MUCH I MISS YOU, SCOTT?"
"YOU WERE RIGHT, JEAN... WE'LL ALWAYS BE TOGETHER. NOT EVEN DEATH CAN STOP OUR LOVE."
"OF COURSE NOT, DARLING...BECAUSE THERE IS NO DEATH ANYMORE."

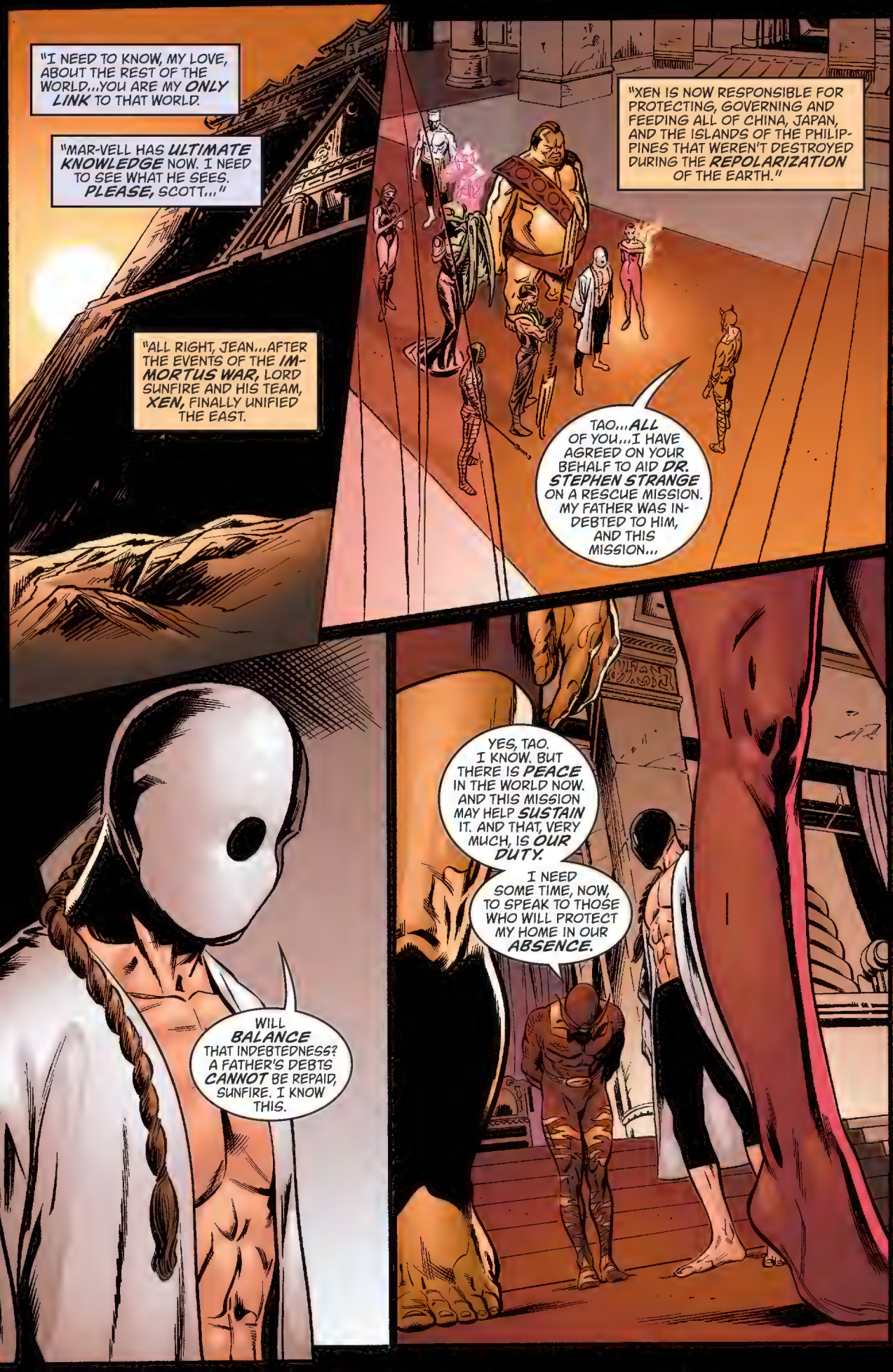
"BUT DEATH'S DEATH IS THE PROBLEM, JEAN. WHEN MAR-VELL KILLED DEATH...THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID HE DID, RIGHT?"

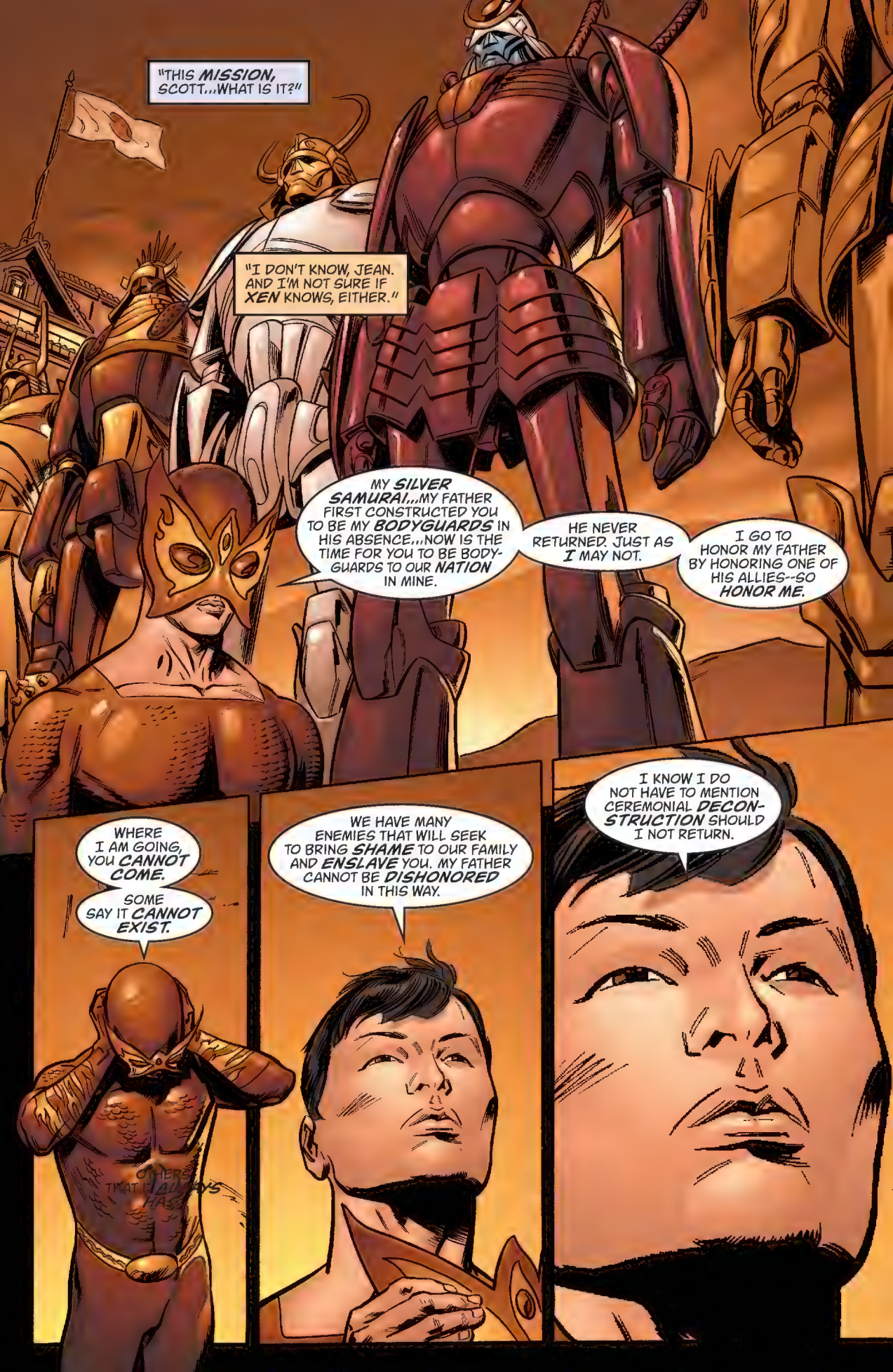
LOOK, REED, THIS IS A SUPERNATURAL PROBLEM, MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT. AND IT WILL REQUIRE A SUPER-NATURAL SOLUTION.
YOU'VE FOUND RELIGION, McCOY?
I WOULDN'T CALL IT RELIGION, BRUCE...IT'S LOGIC, THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SCIENCE...

...A FORCE FROM OUTSIDE OUR REALM HAS SOMEHOW CEASED TO EXIST, AND NOW THAT FORCE IS SORELY MISSED.
IF NOT SUPERNATURAL, THEN "OTHER-NATURAL," IF YOU PREFER...THIS OTHER NATURE IS WHERE WE WILL FIND A SOLUTION.
"WHAT IS THE PROBLEM, SCOTT?"


"NO ONE IS DYING, JEAN. PEOPLE ARE MORTALLY WOUNDED... BUT INSTEAD OF DYING, THEY JUST LIE THERE, SUFFERING.
"BUT MAR-VELL SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS WOULD HAPPEN. I DON'T UNDER-STAND."


"WITH DEATH NOW DEAD, ALL THOSE WHO WOULD HAVE NORMALLY DIED DUE TO WOUNDS AND HAVING THEIR BODIES BROKEN, WRITHE IN PAIN.
"GIANT HOSPITALS HAVE BEEN BUILT OUT OF THE REMAINS OF THE HUMAN TORCHES TO HOUSE THESE POOR, HOPELESS PEOPLE.
"THERE ARE CURRENTLY FIFTY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.
"MAR-VELL MAY HAVE SAVED EVERYONE IN DEATH'S REALM, JEAN...BUT HE DAMNED US TO KEEP ON LIVING."
"SCOTT...I HAD NO IDEA...
"WHY WOULD MAR-VELL ALLOW THIS...?"
"EVEN MORE OF A QUESTION IS THIS: DID MAR-VELL EVEN KNOW? IS THAT WHY HE SENT DR. STRANGE BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING?
"STRANGE IS THE HEAD CONSULTANT ON THE ENTIRE PROJECT. STRANGE, OF COURSE, LOST THE ABILITY TO BE A SURGEON YEARS AGO, BUT THIS ISN'T ABOUT SAVING LIVES.
"NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TO DO."


"I NEED TO KNOW, MY LOVE, ABOUT THE REST OF THE WORLD...YOU ARE MY ONLY LINK TO THAT WORLD.
"MAR-VELL HAS ULTIMATE KNOWLEDGE NOW. I NEED TO SEE WHAT HE SEES. PLEASE, SCOTT..."
"ALL RIGHT, JEAN...AFTER THE EVENTS OF THE IMMORTUS WAR, LORD SUNFIRE AND HIS TEAM, XEN, FINALLY UNIFIED THE EAST.
"XEN IS NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING, GOVERNING AND FEEDING ALL OF CHINA, JAPAN, AND THE ISLANDS OF THE PHILIPPINES THAT WEREN'T DESTROYED DURING THE REPOLARIZATION OF THE EARTH."
TAO...ALL OF YOU...I HAVE AGREED ON YOUR BEHALF TO AID DR. STEPHEN STRANGE ON A RESCUE MISSION. MY FATHER WAS INDEBTED TO HIM, AND THIS MISSION...
WILL BALANCE THAT INDEBTEDNESS? A FATHER'S DEBTS CANNOT BE REPAID, SUNFIRE. I KNOW THIS.
YES, TAO. I KNOW. BUT THERE IS PEACE IN THE WORLD NOW. AND THIS MISSION MAY HELP SUSTAIN IT. AND THAT, VERY MUCH, IS OUR DUTY.
I NEED SOME TIME, NOW, TO SPEAK TO THOSE WHO WILL PROTECT MY HOME IN OUR ABSENCE.


"THIS MISSION, SCOTT...WHAT IS IT?"
"I DON'T KNOW, JEAN. AND I'M NOT SURE IF XEN KNOWS, EITHER."
MY SILVER SAMURAI...MY FATHER FIRST CONSTRUCTED YOU TO BE MY BODYGUARDS IN HIS ABSENCE...NOW IS THE TIME FOR YOU TO BE BODYGUARDS TO OUR NATION IN MINE.
HE NEVER RETURNED. JUST AS I MAY NOT.
I GO TO HONOR MY FATHER BY HONORING ONE OF HIS ALLIES--SO HONOR ME.
WHERE I AM GOING, YOU CANNOT COME.
SOME SAY IT CANNOT EXIST.
WE HAVE MANY ENEMIES THAT WILL SEEK TO BRING SHAME TO OUR FAMILY AND ENSLAVE YOU. MY FATHER CANNOT BE DISHONORED IN THIS WAY.
I KNOW I DO NOT HAVE TO MENTION CEREMONIAL DECONSTRUCTION SHOULD I NOT RETURN.

"IN ENGLAND, AN UPCOMING MARRIAGE CEREMONY BETWEEN KING BRITAIN AND MEDUSA IS THE TALK OF THE WORLD.
"THE HOPE IS THAT THE MARRIAGE OF THE INHUMAN QUEEN AND THE KING OF ENGLAND WILL CREATE A SORT OF WORLDWIDE AUTHORITY, AN ULTIMATE POWER FOR THE POPULATION TO RALLY UNDER."
MEGGAN...I DIDN'T THINK THIS DECISION WOULD EVER COME. I WILL WED AGAIN, AND TO DO SO, WILL BE TO DENY YOU.
I WANTED TO THANK YOU, BRIAN, FOR BEING SUCH A GOOD FATH--SUCH A GOOD PRO-TECTOR OF MY SON...
...I FORGET HOW MUCH MEGGAN MEANT TO YOU... I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE MY HUSBAND IS GONE.
THAT'S THE WAY IT IS WITH LOSS... YOU ALWAYS THINK YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO GOES THROUGH IT.
YOU ARE A MAN OF TREMENDOUS HONOR, BRIAN.
IT IS A YOKE I DO NOT WISH. AS IS MY STEWARDSHIP OF EXCALIBUR, THE SWORD OF ARTHUR, THE SWORD FORGED IN HEAVEN.
I STILL DO NOT KNOW WHY MAR-VELL LEFT IT HERE, WITH ME.
PERHAPS HE KNOWS WHAT I SEE, KING BRIAN.
OR PERHAPS EVEN MAR-VELL IS FALLIBLE.

YOU STILL PLAN TO GO INTO SPACE, KAREN?
YES, BLACK KNIGHT. WHEN I WAS IN THE SAVAGE LAND, I MET CABLE, THE X-MAN.
HE'S A PRISONER WHO CAN ONLY BE FREED BY SERSI, ONE OF THE ETERNALS WHO WAS TRAPPED IN VIBRANIUM.
YOUR MOTHER KNOWS WHERE THE ETERNALS WERE ENCASED. I MADE A PROMISE TO CABLE THAT I WOULD USE MY ABILITIES TO CONTROL VIBRANIUM TO FIND A WAY TO FREE HIM.
WHEN WILL YOU GO?
AFTER KING BRIAN AND YOUR MOTHER'S WEDDING.
YOU SHOULD NOT GO ALONE, KAREN...
...THE IRON AVENGERS WILL JOIN YOU ON YOUR MISSION.
"SCOTT...THE WAR IS OVER, DEATH IS DEAD... BUT I'M AFRAID WE MAY HAVE WON SOMETHING WE SHOULDN'T EVER HAVE DARED. THERE'S PEACE...BUT AT WHAT COST?"
"I KNOW, JEAN...BUT IT CAN'T ALL BE WRONG. I CAN'T HELP THINKING THAT IF THERE WERE NO DEATH, I WOULD HAVE NEVER LOST YOU THAT DAY ON THE MOON."

"I MET A MAN HERE NAMED CRUSHER, SCOTT. HE TOLD ME HOW HE SAVED THE WORLD. HOW HE REPOLARIZED THE PLANET. HE TOLD ME WHAT HE DID TO NEW YORK CITY.
"WHAT DIDN'T HE TELL ME?"
"NEW YORK IS A CITY OF PEOPLE WHO THRIVE IN ADVERSITY.
"THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY INTO THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD IS DUE LARGELY TO THE EFFORTS OF THE LAW."
5th PRECINCT
I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU, PETER AND MAY, TO LIEUTENANT SKULLY. HE'S GOT WHAT IT TAKES.
KNOWING YOU, CAGE, THAT MEANS A CRIMINAL RECORD.
CUT IT OUT, DAD. HE'S CUTE.
WHAT HE IS, IS OLDER THAN ME, MAY.

"JEAN? MEPHISTO BRAINWASHED NIGHTCRAWLER AND SENT HIM BACK THROUGH TIME TO FIGHT US AS THE VILLAIN, BELASCO.
"BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED IN THE PAST YEAR. IT REALLY IS AMAZING."
"WHERE IS KURT NOW?"
"MAR-VELL HELPED KURT SEE THE TRUTH AND TAKE HOLD OF WHO HE IS, NOT WHO HE WAS MADE TO BELIEVE HE WAS.
"YOU KNOW KURT...HE'S ALWAYS GOT TO BE THE HERO NO MATTER WHERE HE IS. RIGHT NOW HE'S THE NEW SWASHBUCKLER OF A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT LOST THEIRS YEARS AGO.
"HE'S MADE A NEW HOME FOR HIMSELF.
"IN HELL'S KITCHEN."

"I WISH THERE WAS A WAY TO LET HIM KNOW THAT WE WERE ALL MANIPULATED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER...
"...THAT WE UNDERSTAND... THAT IT'S OKAY."
"HE KNOWS, JEAN. KURT KNOWS.
"AND YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'VE ALL BEEN MANIPULATED. FOR GOOD AND EVIL. PERHAPS NONE MORE SO THAN THOR AND HIS KINSMEN."
SO, LOKI, YOU WEREN'T LYING ABOUT YOUR FELLOW ASGARDIANS. HOW UNLIKE YOU.
THE TRUTH REVEALS THE LIES AND WHO SPOKE THEM, SURTER.
MY FATHER... NO...THE PERSON MASQUERADING AS ODIN HAS IMPRISONED US BY HIS MYTH AND LORE.
HELP US FREE THOSE HE IMPRISONED. HELP US TAKE VENGEANCE.
WHO IS TO SAY ODIN WON'T MANIPULATE US AGAIN, LITTLE GOD?
HE BUILT ASGARD WITH HIS LIES. AND THE SAME TOOLS THAT BUILD CAN BE USED TO TEAR DOWN!
NOW TELL ME, SURTER...HAVE YOU EVER FANCIED YOURSELF AS BECOMING THE MIDGARD SERPENT?

"SCOTT, I HAVE TO GO... BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU. WE'LL SPEAK AGAIN SOON, MY DEAR.
"WE NEED TO FIND MORE SOULS TO BRING INTO PARADISE.
"I'D ASK YOU TO PRAY FOR ME, SCOTT...FOR THE DECISIONS I HAVE TO MAKE, BUT I WOULDN'T KNOW WHO TO TELL YOU TO PRAY TO."

I'VE COME BACK, MOTHER... COME BACK, FATHER. PARADISE AWAITS YOU.
A BETTER LIFE. THE REASON YOU CAME TO AMERICA IN THE FIRST PLACE. YOU JUST NEED TO BELIEVE.
YOU ARE THE REASON I'M HERE. THERE'S ROOM FOR YOU THERE...
IT'S ALL A LIE, ROGERS. I KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
FROM ONE LIE TO ANOTHER. THAT'S ALL YOU'RE OFFERING.
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN THERE.

ARE YOU SO SURE?
THE END WAS HERE
LISTEN TO ME! ADMIT THE TRUTH ABOUT YOURSELVES...ADMIT THAT YOU ARE GHOSTS...
DINNER'S ON, MR. SOLDIER. WE CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR YOUR STORIES!
YOU EVER SEE A DEAD BODY BEFORE, MISTER?
SIT AND EAT, PLEASE. IT'S NOT EVERY DAY WE HAVE A REAL WAR HERO UNDER OUR ROOF.

"SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS THAT MULTIPLE REALITIES EXIST AS A RESULT OF MEPHISTO TRYING TO ESCAPE DIVINE JUDGMENT AT THE END OF TIME?"
YES. BUT MEPHISTO WASN'T THE DEVIL IN THE END, JUST ANOTHER FOOL BEING MANIPULATED LIKE ANY OF US.
LIKE YOU.
BELIEVE ME, THIS ISN'T NECES-SARY.
I'M A HERO, AS WELL...I KNOW SPIDER-MAN.
I'M FRIENDS WITH REED RICHARDS WHO KNOWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING ON EARTH.
I'VE BEEN ONE OF THE AVENGERS, EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES...
EARTH'S MIGHTIEST "WHAT?" EARTH'S, YOU SAY? WHAT MAKES YOU THINK "EARTH'S" HEROES WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE TO US?

WE'RE THE GUARDIANS OF THE ENTIRE FREAKIN' GALAXY.

CHAPTER ONE

"Why have you come back so far? Why again?"

"I want to know what happened."

"What happened when?

"Do you want to know of the mutation of mankind, of the silent King who transformed every man, woman and child on the planet into an Inhuman?

"Or do you want to know about the war that was fought over who the population of Earth will be — mutant or human?

"Or do you want to know the origins of alternate realities and why they diverge? You come from one, after all, Major Astro."

"We want to know *everything*, robot."

"How did you find out about what's happened to Earth now? You live in the 31st Century."

"But I live *here*, as well... don't I, X-51?"

"I'm afraid you don't, Major. Not anymore. Vance Astro is dead."

"YOU KNOW THAT ***VANCE ASTRO,*** THE AVENGER KNOWN AS ***JUSTICE,*** IS ***DEAD*** ALREADY, DON'T YOU? AND IT MAY HAVE BEEN ***YOUR FAULT.*** WHAT IS YOUR ***GAME,*** MAJOR ASTRO?"

"YOU TELL ME, ROBOT."

"WHEN YOU ***GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*** FIRST CAME TO EARTH, YOU MET YOURSELF AND TOLD YOUNG VANCE OF THE DARK FUTURE YOU CAME FROM... A FUTURE WHERE MANKIND HAD BEEN ENSLAVED BY AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE ***BADOON.***

"EVENTUALLY ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** WIPED YOUNG VANCE'S MIND OF YOUR MEETING AND OF HIS POSSIBLE DESTINY. BUT HE DIDN'T ERASE THE ***KNOWLEDGE*** OF YOUR ALTERNATE SELF.

"NOR DID HE AFFECT THE ***DISSATISFACTION*** OF YOUR LIFE AS A MEMBER OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY.

"AND WHILE THE ***DEFENDERS*** TRAVELED TO YOUR FUTURE THROUGH DOCTOR STRANGE'S MAGICS AND HELPED YOU GAIN A DECISIVE VICTORY OVER THE BADOON, YOU ***NEVER FORGOT*** YOUR MEETING WITH YOURSELF.

"YOU NEVER FORGOT EVERYTHING YOU ***LOST*** ON EARTH WHEN YOUR MISSION IN SPACE WENT AWRY AND YOUR BODY WAS PLUNGED INTO ***SUSPENDED ANIMATION.***

"YOU AWOKE INTO A ***WAR...*** AND A SITUATION YOU WOULD DO ***ANYTHING*** TO ESCAPE.

"EVEN IF THAT MEANT ***DYING*** A LITTLE SO YOU COULD CONTINUE LIVING ON EARTH."

"WHAT'S THE ROBOT SAYING, MAJOR?"

"NOTHING, CHARLIE. SHUT UP."

"AND WHEN THE SUPERCOMPUTER ***KORVAC*** TRAVELED BACK IN TIME TO KILL YOU AT AN EARLIER AGE, YOU MADE CERTAIN HE DIDN'T. BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH.

"YOU ***COULD*** HAVE RETURNED TO YOUR NEWLY ADOPTED ERA AT THAT TIME...

"...BUT YOU ***DIDN'T.***

"YOU WANTED TO ***LEAVE*** SOMETHING OF YOURSELF TO REMEMBER THIS WORLD BY.

"EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT THIS MEETING--THE ***SECOND,*** THOUGH YOUNG VANCE DIDN'T KNOW IT--AWAKENED THE ***PSYCHIC ABILITIES*** WITHIN HIM.

"BUT INSTEAD, YOU PASSED ON PART OF YOUR ***MENTAL PSI POWER*** TO HIM.

"YOU CREATED A ***PSYCHIC RAPPORT*** FOR YOURSELF AND LEFT EVERYONE ON EARTH TO BELIEVE ITS ORIGINS WERE FROM WITHIN ***VANCE*** HIMSELF."

"BUT IT WASN'T VANCE WHO HAD THE PSI ABILITY, IT WAS YOU. THAT'S WHY HE WAS NEVER AS POWERFUL AS YOU, MAJOR ASTRO.
"YOU USED HIM AND MANIPULATED YOURSELF BY MAKING YOURSELF A HERO, AS LEADER OF THE NEW WARRIORS AND LATER, A MEMBER OF THE AVENGERS.
"PERHAPS THIS IN ITSELF WAS THE REASON VANCE CHOSE TO CALL HIMSELF JUSTICE.
"BECAUSE THIS WAS THE VERY NOTION THAT HAD BEEN DENIED HIM."
"HOW DID I DIE?"

"THERE WAS A BOY...THE SON OF THE HERO COMET MAN, WHO HAD A TERRIBLE POWER TRIGGERED WITHIN HIM.
"THIS BOY WOULD LATER BE KNOWN AS THE SKULL.
"WHEN THE POWER TO CONTROL THE MOTOR CONTROLS OF EVERY BEING ON THE PLANET WAS BORN WITHIN HIM, EVERY PSYCHIC ON EARTH WAS INSTANTLY OVERWHELMED AND DIED IN CARDIAC ARREST."
"YOU CAN'T BLAME ME FOR THAT."
"THE POWER YOU LEFT WITH VANCE KEPT HIS OWN UNMUTATED SEED DORMANT, MAJOR. THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES HE WOULD HAVE EVEN HAD PSYCHIC ABILITIES.
"YOU AS GOOD AS COMMITTED SUICIDE, MAJOR. AND FOR THAT, JUSTICE IS DEAD NOW."

NOW WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME WHY YOU'RE REALLY HERE?
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T BE BLAMED FOR THIS.
WHY SHOULDN'T YOU BE BLAMED?
MAJOR?
I THINK WE'VE LEARNED ALL WE CAN FROM THE ROBOT.
IF THIS STARTED WITH THE INHUMANS MUTATING THE WORLD, WE GO TO THEIR HIDDEN CITY NEXT.
READY THE SHIP, MARTINEX.
WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?
YOU KNOW WHAT I SAID. I WILL NOT HIDE THE TRUTH AS UATU DID.

"A LANDING WE CAN WALK AWAY FROM THIS TIME, MARTINEX."
"YES, MAJOR."
MAJOR, WE AREN'T ALONE.
SEE WHAT YOU CAN SEE FROM THE AIR, STARHAWK.
I DON'T THINK SO.
MARTINEX? CHARLIE?
MAJOR? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
YOU ARE ALL SO OBVIOUS.
YOU WEAR WEAKNESS LIKE PROPAGANDA.
I AM KARNAK. LOYAL SERVANT OF THE DEAD KING OF THE INHUMANS.
YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE.

"AND I THINK THE PHRASE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS '*HEAVEN HELP US.*'"

WHAT DO YOU SEE, MATTHEW?

I DON'T KNOW, STEVE... I THINK I SEE THAT HEAVEN IS WHAT YOU *WANT* IT TO BE.

IT'S OURS FOR THE WISHING.

"*JOHNNY STORM* NOW HAS AN ETERNITY WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY.

"THERE IS NO *DOCTOR DOOM* THERE. NO *SKRULL INVASION.* NO *MOLE MAN.* AND NO *FANTASTIC FOUR FLARE* BECKONING IN THE SKY TO BREAK UP HIS AFFAIRS.

"THERE IS NO *OLDER SISTER* TO MEASURE UP TO. THERE IS NO *BEN GRIMM* TO BE EMBARRASSED BY, NO *REED RICHARDS* TO POINT OUT THE NEEDS OF THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN UNIVERSE.

"HE CAN *LIVE FOREVER* IN IGNORANCE OF HIS FELLOW MAN'S NEEDS. AND SEE ONLY HIS *OWN.*

"FOR *JOHNNY BLAZE,* PARADISE IS NOT A CHOICE OF IDEALIZED PLEASURE. IT'S MORE LIKE *PURGATORY.*

"FOR BLAZE, THERE IS A *HIGHWAY* BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL.

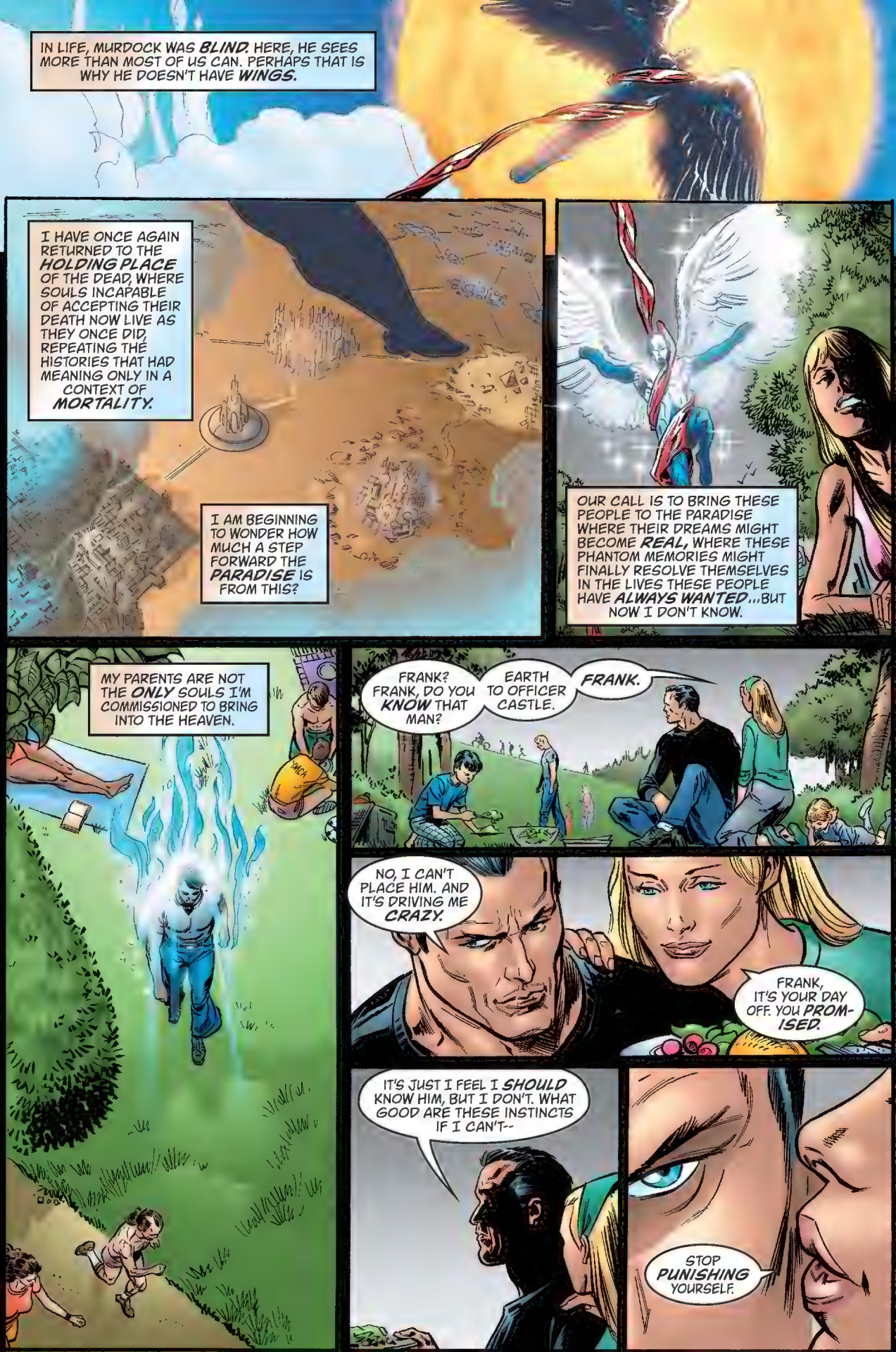
"BUT I'M NOT CERTAIN JOHNNY KNOWS WHICH *DIRECTION* HE'S GOING IN. THIS, TOO, MAY BE HIS DECISION.

"FOR THE BROTHER OF BLACK BOLT, *MAXIMUS,* IS KING OF THE INHUMANS AND REIGNS WITH *WISDOM* AND *INNER STRENGTH.*

"HIS *RATIONALITY* HAS BEEN COMPLETELY RESTORED. AND HE LEADS IN LOVE AS HE COULD NEVER DO IN LIFE.

"THERE IS NO *COSMIC SCREAM* TO ROB HIM OF HIS RATIONALE."

WHAT OF JIM BARNES?
JIM BARNES?
"JIM BARNES...YOUR OLD PARTNER, BUCKY, IS--"
"YES? JIM WAS ALWAYS HIS OWN MAN. I CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR. WHAT DO YOU SEE?"
"HE'S...HAPPY, STEVE. MAYBE THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW."
THAT'S GOOD.
IT'S STRANGE, THESE WISHES... APART FROM BUCKY, THEY SEEM SO ANCHORED IN OUR PREVIOUS LIVES, NOT LIKE THE HEAVEN I'D HOPED FOR AT ALL.
THEY ARE ONLY DREAMS, THEN, THAT THEY LIVE. THEY ARE ASLEEP.
NO, THEY HAVE EACH CREATED DIFFERENT REALITIES THROUGH THE PIECES OF THE COSMIC CUBE EACH HAS CONSUMED.
EACH IS AS REAL AS THE WORLD WE CAME FROM WITH ONE EXCEPTION.
THE INHABITANTS OF EACH OF THEIR WORLDS EXIST ONLY BECAUSE THE CREATORS AND DREAMERS LOOK FOR THEM THERE.
MY BROTHER IS SANE...AND HE IS KING.
THERE'S NO NEED TO REGRET THE PAST, BOLT. IT'S NOT OUR JOB TO JUDGE THE WANTS OF THOSE WHO COME TO THE PARADISE... FOR GOOD OR BAD.
AFTER ALL, HOW CAN THERE BE ANYTHING BAD HERE?


IN LIFE, MURDOCK WAS BLIND. HERE, HE SEES MORE THAN MOST OF US CAN. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY HE DOESN'T HAVE WINGS.
I HAVE ONCE AGAIN RETURNED TO THE HOLDING PLACE OF THE DEAD, WHERE SOULS INCAPABLE OF ACCEPTING THEIR DEATH NOW LIVE AS THEY ONCE DID, REPEATING THE HISTORIES THAT HAD MEANING ONLY IN A CONTEXT OF MORTALITY.
I AM BEGINNING TO WONDER HOW MUCH A STEP FORWARD THE PARADISE IS FROM THIS?
OUR CALL IS TO BRING THESE PEOPLE TO THE PARADISE WHERE THEIR DREAMS MIGHT BECOME REAL, WHERE THESE PHANTOM MEMORIES MIGHT FINALLY RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE LIVES THESE PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS WANTED...BUT NOW I DON'T KNOW.
MY PARENTS ARE NOT THE ONLY SOULS I'M COMMISSIONED TO BRING INTO THE HEAVEN.
FRANK? FRANK, DO YOU KNOW THAT MAN?
EARTH TO OFFICER CASTLE.
FRANK.
NO, I CAN'T PLACE HIM. AND IT'S DRIVING ME CRAZY.
FRANK, IT'S YOUR DAY OFF. YOU PROMISED.
IT'S JUST I FEEL I SHOULD KNOW HIM, BUT I DON'T. WHAT GOOD ARE THESE INSTINCTS IF I CAN'T--
STOP PUNISHING YOURSELF.

THERE HE IS. WE WOULDN'T BE HERE IF IT WEREN'T FOR CASTLE.
SPEAK FOR YOURSELVES. MURDOCK KILLED ME WITH THE LAW, EVEN AFTER I KILLED HIM AND FRAMED IT ON THE WITCH, ELEKTRA.
AND THERE HE STOOD, WANTING TO OFFER ME ETERNAL LIFE...WANTING TO BE THE AMBASSADOR OF ALL I DESIRE.
AS IF ALL COULD BE FORGIVEN IN HEAVEN.
YOU KNOW WHAT I JUST THOUGHT OF?
WHAT?
CASTLE CAN'T KILL US HERE.
LET'S LET HIM THINK HE CAN.

YOU NEED A LESSON IN POWER.
POWER COMES FROM ONE'S HOLDINGS, ONE'S WORTH...A PORTFOLIO OF LEGAL AND ILLEGAL BUSINESSES AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT BUILD AN EMPIRE.
THE POWER TO NOT EXACT REVENGE, BUT TO BE ABOVE IT FOR THE SAKE OF EFFICIENCY. THE POWER TO END LIFE, WHETHER YOU HAVE A GRIEVANCE AGAINST IT OR NOT.
IT COMES FROM KNOWING AND OWNING EVERYTHING.
IT COMES FROM THE CONVICTION THAT OTHERS ARE POWERLESS BEFORE YOU.
UNTOUCHABLE... IT COMES...COMES FROM...
EXCUSE ME, MISS...
...VANESSA?

"SCOTT? SCOTT, ARE YOU AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN STILL WITH REED RICHARDS IN LATVERIA?"
"YES, JEAN...
"...WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE PARADISE?"
"IT'S DIFFICULT, SCOTT. THE IDEA OF EVERYONE GETTING WHAT THEY WANT IN THIS HEAVEN SOUNDS GREAT IN PRINCIPLE...BUT THEN YOU SEE IT, AND YOU WONDER WHERE WE ALL WENT WRONG."
THREE WEEKS O' THIS. THREE WEEKS.
AN' YA WANT TA KNOW WHAT STINKS THE MOST ABOUT IT? OTHER'N HULK'S DIAPER, I MEAN.
NO ONE'S EVEN WATCHIN' TA SEE WHICH OF US IS STRONGER.
IT'S LIKE NOBODY CARES ABOUT ANSWERING THE BIG QUESTIONS ANYMORE.
TRUTH IS, JADE-JAWS, WE'RE OUT HERE SO WE DON'T MAKE IT ANY HARDER ON ANYBODY IN THE CASTLE.
"I'VE NEVER FELT SO POWER-LESS BEFORE IN MY LIFE, JEAN.
"THE CASTLE'S BEEN TURNED INTO A HOSPITAL.
"GOD'S WAITING ROOM IS MORE LIKE IT. EXCEPT GOD'S GONE FISHING.
"WE JUST NEVER REALIZED HOW LUCKY WE WERE TO HAVE DEATH BE A PART OF THE WORLD. SOMETIMES I WISH MAR-VELL HAD NEVER--"
"I KNOW, SCOTT. WHAT ABOUT THE BOY MAR-VELL?"

"HE'S DIFFERENT NOW. LESS CONFIDENT. I DON'T THINK THE BATTLE AGAINST DEATH WENT THE WAY HE'D EXPECTED.
"AND NOW THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS SUFFERING, EVERYONE BLAMES HIM."
I AM CUT OFF FROM MY OTHER SELF, REED. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE PARADISE.
I KNOW, MAR-VELL. WE'VE ALL BEEN CUT OFF.
I'VE ATTEMPTED TO CONTACT GENIS, THE SON OF MAR-VELL, BUT I CAN'T FIND HIM ANYWHERE. I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR YEARS.
THERE WAS NO GENIS, REED. ONLY RICK JONES. GENIS WAS JUST ANOTHER FIGMENT OF RICK JONES' MUTATION.
JONES WAS JUST SO CONVINCED THAT HE COULD NEVER REALLY HAVE ANY POWER, AND NEVER ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT HE HAD THE ABILITY TO CREATE HEROES OUT OF HIS MIND.
THE KREE-SKRULL WAR. THE WAR AT THE END OF TIME WITH THE TIME-LOST AVENGERS. GENIS.
THE SUPREME INTELLIGENCE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN.
IT WAS RICK ALL THE TIME. AND WITH RICK DEAD, SO ARE ALL THE HEROES HE COULD CREATE TO SAVE THE DAY.

I'LL BE GLAD WHEN WE CAN TAKE CARE OF YOUR WISH, ORORO.
EVERY TIME YOU GET HUNGRY, MY MUTANT HEALING FACTOR GETS A KILLER WORK-OUT.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE MY DAD LIVES THERE.
NOT A PERSON THERE THAT ISN'T WALKING ON WALLS NOW.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER. IT WAS A JOKE.
HEY! THAT'S MY DAD!
AND VENOM'S RIGHT BEHIND HIM!
HURRY!

LEAVE MY DAD ALONE, YOU MONSTER!!
WHOSE DAD?!
MY DAD?!
JUST ONCE, YA KNOW...JUST ONCE.
SHUT UP, 'PUTER, HE RECOGNIZES US. I'LL EXPLAIN...
I THINK I'VE BEEN AT THIS LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.

DON'T BOTHER TO TELL ME...THAT'S SPIDER-GIRL OR SPIDIA OR THE AMAZING WEBBED WONDERBRA AND SHE'S ACTUALLY MY DAUGHTER FROM ANOTHER REALITY AND SHE'S TRYING TO SAVE ME FROM VENOM...WHO SHE HASN'T REALIZED YET IS ALSO MY DAUGHTER...AND THIS WHOLE BATTLE IS GOING TO TURN INTO A BIG MIS-UNDERSTANDING AND THEN THEY'LL HUG AND CRY AND CARRY ON ABOUT HOW MUCH THEY ALWAYS WANTED TO BE TWIN SISTERS ALL THEIR LIVES...RIGHT?
AN' THE WORST OF IT IS, AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER, THEY'LL BOTH COME AND LIVE WITH ME.
DOC OCK, I COULD FIGHT. GIVE ME THE LIZARD, I COULD FIGHT HIM WITH ONE ARM, WHICH IS REALLY KIND OF AN INSIDE JOKE. GIVE ME THE HYPNO HUSTLER FOR CRIPE'S SAKE.
BUT ANOTHER DAUGHTER?
I THINK I'D RATHER KISS J. JONAH JAMESON! WAIT A MINUTE. BEEN THERE. DONE THAT.
THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I BROKE BETTY'S HEART, ISN'T IT, GOD? THIS IS YOUR UNIVERSAL JUSTICE? YOU PUT A POX UPON MY...HRPH!

"YOU ARE GOING TO BE QUEEN OF ENGLAND, MEDUSA. AREN'T YOU EXCITED?"
I DON'T KNOW, CHILD...THIS IS A POLITICAL MARRIAGE.
STILL, THE GENTILITY I SEE IN MY SON DID NOT COME FROM BLACK BOLT, THE BOY'S FATHER, BUT FROM BRIAN BRADDOCK--KING BRITAIN.
I FEAR THAT THIS AFFECTION I'M FEELING FOR BRADDOCK IS A BETRAYAL OF BOLT...AND OF THE INHUMAN NATION.
BUT, MEDUSA, EVEN YOUR SON IS IN FAVOR OF THIS MARRIAGE.
HE SEES WHAT THE REST OF US DO. THIS IS RIGHT. IT'S MORE THAN MERELY A JOINING OF ENGLAND AND THE INHUMAN NATION.
THIS IS RIGHT.

THIS IS ABOUT PEACE. MORE AND MORE OF THE INHUMAN NATION ARE ARRIVING EVERY DAY.
THERE ARE NOW IRON AVENGERS ON EVERY MAJOR CONTINENT IN THE WORLD.
"THERE ARE GOOD THINGS HAPPENING, MEDUSA. YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL GUILTY IF THEY HAPPEN TO YOU."
AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, LUNA?
ARE GOOD THINGS HAPPENING TO YOU?
"MAYBE."
WHAT ABOUT KING BRIAN? IS HE STILL GRIPPED WITH SADNESS?
HE FEELS MORE THAN WE WERE ALLOWED TO AS INHUMANS...
...UNLIKE MY HUSBAND, HE MUST LIVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT NOT EVERY DECISION HE MAKES IS THE CORRECT ONE.

"I ONCE BELIEVED THAT BOLT WAS THE PERFECT MAN, LUNA...BUT I WAS WRONG.
"HE COULD NOT LOVE.
"AND SO THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD LOSE, REALLY.
"KING BRIAN HAS LOST EVERYTHING.
"HIS WIFE. HIS FRIENDS. HIS FAMILY.
"AND HE HAS BEEN ASKED TO WIELD A WEAPON MEANT TO HEAL, NOT DESTROY. A WEAPON NOT MADE BY HUMAN HANDS. YET, HE HAS SPILLED BLOOD WITH THAT SAME WEAPON.
"HOW HEAVY IT MUST BE.
"IF I AM GOING TO BE QUEEN, I AM GOING TO HAVE TO SHARE IN HIS SORROW.
"AND I NEVER LEARNED HOW TO DO THAT."

HOW ARE YOU TODAY, MR. JAMESON?
I'M DYING BUT I AM NOT, STRANGE.
NOTHING TO REPORT, LIKE ANYONE STUCK IN THIS PRISON YOU CALL A HOSPITAL.
YOU REQUESTED TO BE MOVED TO THIS FACILITY, MR. JAMESON. YOU TELL ME.
IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D BLAME ALL THIS ON SPIDER-MAN.
THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE KILLING PEOPLE, OR AT LEAST FILLING UP YOUR HOSPITALS WITH PEOPLE...
...GOOD PEOPLE THAT NEVER FOUGHT IN THEIR UNDERWEAR.
DIDN'T KNOW BETTER?
YOU THOUGHT SPIDER-MAN WAS THE ONLY ONE I WAS WATCHING ALL THOSE YEARS.
I WATCHED ALL OF YOU.
I LISTENED AND COLLECTED AND COLLATED ALL THE STORIES, WHETHER THEY COULD BE SUBSTANTIATED OR NOT.
YOU DON'T BECOME PUBLISHER WITHOUT BEING THE BEST DAMN REPORTER FIRST.

TELL ME, THEN. WHO KILLED YOU?
MEPHISTO. THE ONE WE ALL THOUGHT WAS THE DEVIL.
STOP HIM. STOP HIM, BECAUSE YOU SURE AS HELL AREN'T DOIN' ANY GOOD HERE.
THIS IS A GRUDGE MATCH YOU SUPER HEROES STARTED LONG AGO.
NOW THAT HE KNOWS WHAT HE IS AND WHO HE IS NOT, HE DOESN'T HAVE TO ONLY TRY TO BLACKEN OUR SOULS, HE CAN DESTROY US UTTERLY.
BETTER THE DEVIL WE KNEW, STRANGE.
LOKI, GET THE OTHERS.
WE'VE NOW GOT MORE TO DO THAN JUST RESCUE CLEA FROM ASGARD.
"My childhood was a period of waiting for the moment when I could send everyone and everything connected with it to Hell."
—Igor Stravinsky

P A R A D I S E X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

REDWING

"Aaron? Is that you?"

"Hello, Wyatt."

"What's the Watchman of Earth doing here in the remains of Washington, D.C.?"

"What's a hero like Redwing, Wyatt, doing in a place where he can do no good?"

"Steve's dead, Aaron. Haven't I done enough good already?"

"Steve's death was not your fault. You weren't even there."

"Yeah. I wasn't there. And it wasn't my fault. I didn't know self-contradiction was part of your programming."

"Stop it, Wyatt. What you are doing here is something Steve would never have wanted."

"Why are you here?"

"I didn't come to see D.C., Redwing. I came to talk to you. To tell you how Captain America's death serves a purpose that he would want you to now fulfill in his absence."

"Why? Is there another army being formed that you need more dumb muscle for? Is there another banner you want me to wave while more of my friends die because I am not there to save them? While more heroes bite it so that I have less reasons to live than before?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"I wanted to tell you about my father, Abel Stack. About why he built me and what he wanted for me."

"Go on, Aaron, but you're wasting your time. I will not be moved. Steve Rogers is dead. And that is the end of it."

"Why does Steve's death have to be the end of you, the end of the good you could do? You tell me that you weren't there to save him. And I'm telling you that Steve's death was intended to save you along with the rest of mankind."

"I don't feel saved, Aaron. This is more like damnation. Go on, then. Tell me about how I've been saved."

"Like Steve Rogers, Wyatt, I was built to be a soldier, a thinking weapon to be aimed at the enemies of the United States of America. I was built to fight enemies both foreign and domestic. But unlike Cap, I was not a symbol. I, like the rest of the entire X-series, was to be fully disposable in fact.

"But my father, the man that constructed and designed me, had another destiny in mind, one which meant that I would not be deconstructed when the X-series program was dissolved for lack of funding.

"My father didn't want me to fight. He wanted me to be human. He wanted me to know what it meant to love and be loved. He wanted me to know what it was like to be a part of humanity, to be a part of something instead of merely a collection of parts."

"You're making me misty here, Aaron. What's the point?"

"I was built with a self-destruct mechanism in my assembly. When the X-series program was scrapped, I was also slated for destruction. But instead, my father chose to be destroyed himself. He chose death so I would not have to die."

"Your friend, Steve Rogers, wanted the same for you as my father did for me."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You weren't listening at Steve's funeral, Wyatt. You weren't thinking about what Steve gave his life for."

"He lost his life over another stupid cosmic crisis."

"That's so small a view of what happened, Wyatt. Mar-Vell's goal here upon Earth was to build an armory that he could use in the afterlife, not only to kill the being known as Death, but to create a place where mankind could go once it left this plane of mortality. Steve saw that. And he gave his life to make Death an antique concept, to make certain there was a place where we would go, where you would go when you die. Steve died making that a reality. He died so that we'd never have to be afraid of Death again. In many ways the super soldier of America helped to make a place for all those who died in war in all of history. Steve died for this, Wyatt. He died for you. For all of us."

"So I've heard. But look around you, Aaron. This world's hospitals are full of people for whom death would be a comfort."

"Things are not as we expected them to be. Even the child Mar-Vell is confused."

"We're all confused. Are you really telling me that Steve died so that those he was preparing a way for could suffer for all time? Are you really asking me to join another crusade to save the world only to make it worse? The heroes gave Mar-Vell free rein to sell humanity into suffering. Look at Reed..."

"Reed?"

"Sure. Reed Richards calls Galactus, who I know is now his son Franklin Richards, to come and save the Earth. Franklin comes and kills something that was living at the core of the planet. And when he does, he endangers the planet by setting off its polarity."

"Reed's saved the Earth time and time again."

"Of course he has. Just like he's endangered it time and time again by his discoveries of races and beings from other realities that would never have known of Earth if Reed hadn't given them the keys to the planet in the first place."

"Reed needs you now, Wyatt. He is planning to undo what Mar-Vell's done. He doesn't know how yet, but he's going to try to help ease the suffering of mankind."

"That's just like him. Have you thought of what danger this attempt to now ease our suffering will cause?"

"Are you saying Reed should do nothing?"

"No. But, I'm afraid of a world with no enemies for Reed to fight. Think about all the things Reed invented and created and discovered in the midst of fighting Doom, the Skrulls, Namor, Puppet Man and all the rest of them. I'm afraid of how much his mind will conceive now that all the enemies are gone. Did you even wonder how much better the world was with Doom in it? Doom kept Reed occupied. He kept him busy. I'm afraid of what Reed will do without an enemy to face."

"Then there is only one thing you can do, Wyatt."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"Go to Reed. Help him. Give him perspective."

"You think I'll be able to do that? You've seen Reed's whole life, in ways I haven't. I couldn't give Steve perspective, and he died. If I even try to offer the same to Reed, he'll send me on some mission halfway across the world where I won't be able to stop him or his plans to save the world."

"But at least you'll have tried."

"Yes, Aaron. At least I'll have tried."

CHAPTER TWO

"Tell me, Aaron, why was it necessary to offer your Heralds of the Celestial Doom a reward for their heroics? Would they not have helped you, anyway?"

"You're in touch with the cosmic consciousness, Kyle. You know the answer better than I do, and I don't say that sarcastically. I really could be fooling myself. Only you can know for certain why I really offered each of the champions of their various alternate realities a reward for their aid."

"I'm a little surprised by you, Aaron. Because the reason you did it suggests a motivation more mechanical than human. To force the mice to run your inter-dimensional maze you used secret knowledge as a stimulus. You could have trusted in mere heroism, an almost uniquely human quality, certainly one wholly motivated by a hope to alter an expected given catastrophe. Instead, you chose to appeal to their curiosity. You appealed to their self-interest."

"Maybe I just don't want anyone to live in ignorance."

"Or maybe you are beginning to doubt your own humanity. Actually, that's not true. Despite everything, it's not your humanity you doubt. It's your worth. There has been too much talk of good but too little true evidence of it. The Devil himself has been revealed as little more than a misunderstanding. And you now fear that your gears, your design, is little more than an accidental compilation."

"You sound like Uatu."

"The difference between me and the old Watcher is this — he only thought he knew everything, but I really do."

"TAKE ***FRANK CASTELLINI,*** FOR EXAMPLE."

"FRANK ***WHO?*** FRANK ***CASTLE? THE PUNISHER?*** I DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS ITALIAN. WHEN DID HE CHANGE HIS NAME?"

"LONG BEFORE HIS ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME, THE PUNISHER PLAYED IN THE STREETS OF QUEENS WITH THOSE SAME CHILDREN HE WOULD ONE DAY ***HUNT DOWN*** AS PART OF THE MAFIA.

"HE CHANGED HIS NAME TO ***DISTANCE*** HIMSELF FROM THOSE WHO HAD BECOME THE POWER ELITE. A CRIME CARTEL KNOWN INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH AS ***'THE FAMILY.'***

"BUT DO YOU SEE HIS ***PRIDE,*** AARON? DO YOU SEE IT LURKING WITHIN HIM, READY TO PLAY ITSELF OUT?

"YOU HAVE ALL OF ***HISTORY*** TO WATCH HERE, AARON. BUT HAVE YOU EVER BOTHERED TO COUNT HOW MANY ***FAMILIES DIED*** AS A RESULT OF CASTELLINI'S SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM?"

"FAMILIES?"

"CASTLE WAS TRAINED TO ***KILL*** WITHOUT FEELING. TO ***TAKE LIFE*** WITHOUT REMORSE. TO ***MURDER*** WITHOUT INTENT. IN TIMES OF ***WAR.***

"AND THEN ***HIS FAMILY*** WAS KILLED. IN A TIME OF PEACE.

"AND THIS...THIS WAS ***BEYOND*** FRANK CASTLE'S ABILITY TO COMPREHEND. AFTER ALL, WHAT HE HAD DONE TO OTHERS HAD NOW BEEN DONE TO ***HIM.***

"CASTLE HAD BEEN TRAINING THE ***NYPD*** IN THEIR OWN WAR ON CRIME. THE ATTACK ON HIMSELF BY 'THE FAMILY' WAS ***NO ACCIDENT***...BUT THE DEATH OF HIS OWN FAMILY ***WAS.***

"AND THIS...THIS HE COULD NOT ALLOW. THERE WOULD BE ***PUNISHMENT.*** BUT NOT ON CRIME...ON ***HIMSELF.***"

"HIMSELF?"

"FRANK CASTLE WAS ***PUNISHING HIMSELF*** FOR NOT KNOWING HOW TO DEAL WITH THE ***PAIN*** AND ***LOSS*** OF HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN.

"FRANK CASTLE WAS PUNISHING THE ***WORLD*** FOR MAKING HIM A ***KILLING MACHINE***... WITH NO OPTIONS LEFT BUT THAT OF ***TAKING LIFE.***"

"FRANK CASTLE WAS NO HERO, BUT HE WASN'T A ***MACHINE,*** EITHER. I KNOW. BECAUSE I ***AM*** A MACHINE.

"I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO NOT HAVE AN OPTION AND HAVE TO ***PRETEND*** I DO TO COMPLY WITH MY DIVERGENT PROGRAMMING."

"I WANT YOU TO ***THINK,*** AARON. DON'T COMPUTE...DON'T INPUT THE MOST LIKELY POSSIBILITY JUST BECAUSE OF AN INTERNAL PROBABILITY SCHEMATIC. ***THINK.***

"WHY DO YOU THINK HE MADE ENEMIES OUT OF THE ***KINGPIN OF CRIME***...OR ***JIGSAW***...OR ***THE JACKAL?*** WHY ATTACK THE 'HIGH-PROFILE' TARGETS?

"WAS IT ONLY BECAUSE THEY WERE THE MOST POWERFUL? NO, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE THE MOST ***PUBLIC.***

"FRANK CASTLE'S ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME WAS A ***SUICIDE NOTE.***"

"HIS OWN?"

"NO. THE ***WORLD'S.*** HE JUST HAPPENED TO TAKE IT UPON HIMSELF TO ***WRITE*** IT.

"HE SAW MAN AS A BEING THAT SAT IN JUDGMENT UPON ALL ***SAVE HIMSELF.*** AND SO FRANK BECAME A ***JUDGE,*** AS WELL.

"AND ***JURY.*** AND ***EXECUTIONER.***

"BUT PEACE WAS NO GOVERNING AGENT AS FRANK HAD ONCE BELIEVED. DOMESTIC MORALITY WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN THE ***RULES OF WAR.***

"FRANK CONCLUDED IN THAT TERRIBLE MOMENT IN THE PARK THAT ALL OF ***LIFE*** WAS WAR. PEACE WAS AN ILLUSION, A TRENCH-DREAM."

"CASTLE HAD NO CONCERN WHEN HE WAS APPREHENDED AND SENT TO ***PRISON.***

"HE KNEW HE WAS ***GUILTY.***

"HE ALSO KNEW THAT HE WAS GOING TO A PLACE WHERE THERE WERE LOTS AND LOTS OF ***CRIMINALS.***

"WHAT CASTLE DIDN'T KNOW, WAS THAT BY ALLOWING HIMSELF TO BE ARRESTED, HE'D BE DESTROYING THE POSSIBILITY OF JOY FOR ATTORNEY ***MATT MURDOCK.***"

"YOU'RE SPEAKING ABOUT ***ELEKTRA?***

"I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. CASTLE LEAKED INFORMATION TO A FELLOW PRISONER WHO WENT BY THE CODE-NAME OF ***BULLSEYE*** THAT THE KINGPIN HAD A NEW ASSASSIN...A WOMAN NAMED ***ELEKTRA.***

"BULLSEYE ESCAPED PRISON AND ***MURDERED*** ELEKTRA."

"BUT MATT MURDOCK--***DAREDEVIL***--LOVED ELEKTRA, AND HIS LOVE WAS ***CHANGING*** HER FROM WHAT SHE WAS.

"THEY MIGHT HAVE BECOME A ***FAMILY.*** SHE MIGHT HAVE LEARNED TO LOVE AGAIN.

"BULLSEYE WAS BLAMED. THE KINGPIN WAS BLAMED. BUT WHY WASN'T ***FRANK CASTLE?***"

"BUT...HE WAS. HE WAS BLAMED, ***WASN'T*** HE? OF COURSE, THAT'S WHY DAREDEVIL ***SHOT*** HIM."

"MATT MURDOCK HAD NEVER LIFTED A GUN IN HIS LIFE BEFORE. AND NOW HE ***HAD.*** HE DIDN'T KILL CASTLE. BUT A ***SHOT*** WAS FIRED ALL THE SAME.

"AND FRANK CASTLE BEGAN TO REALIZE WHAT HE HAD BECOME. A ***CORRUPTER*** TO THE WORLD.

"HE WASN'T JUST PUNISHING THE WORLD FOR WHAT IT WAS, FOR WHAT IT ***MADE*** HIM...

"...HE, LIKE THE PLAGUE THAT WOULD SOON MUTATE MANKIND, WAS ***PERPETUATING*** IT, SPREADING THE VIOLENCE THROUGH THE STREETS.

"AND YET, HIS WAR COULD NOT STOP. IT COULD NOT END. HE WAS AN ***ADDICT*** BY NOW.

"THERE IS NO ***TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM*** FOR MASS MURDERERS. HE WAS CARELESS, WILD IN HIS INTENT TO PUNISH THE GUILTY--***ALL*** OF THE GUILTY.

"A SPRAY OF BULLETS FROM HIS OWN GUN ACCIDENTALLY ***KILLED*** YET ANOTHER FAMILY, AS INNOCENT AS HIS OWN...BUT IN FRANK'S UNDERSTANDING NOW, AS ***GUILTY*** AS HIS OWN."

"GUILTY? OF WHAT?"

"OF ***BEING THERE.*** OF BEING ***ANYWHERE*** WHERE CRIME COULD BE. YOU SEE, THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR ***INNOCENCE*** IN FRANK'S WORLD ANYMORE.

"DAREDEVIL, SPIDER-MAN, THE AVENGERS AND A FEW OTHERS BANDED TOGETHER TO ***HUNT DOWN*** CASTLE.

"THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE ***BOTHERED.***"

"FRANK ***KILLED HIMSELF.*** EVERYONE THOUGHT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE FAMILY HE ACCIDENTALLY MURDERED."

"NO. HE KILLED HIMSELF BECAUSE THE CLOSER HE GOT TO THE ***SOURCE*** OF CRIME, THE MORE HE SAW IT AT WORK IN ALL INDIVIDUALS...EVEN ***HIMSELF.***"

"IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO KNOW WHAT FRANK WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE IF HE'D BEEN AWARE THAT MANKIND'S HOSTILITY WAS THE RESULT OF ***CELESTIAL MANIPULATION...***"

"I COULD TELL YOU WHAT HE WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE."

"NO. THAT'S OKAY. I DON'T NEED TO KNOW."

"ALL THIS IS TO SAY, AARON, YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO WONDER IF THERE'S ANY ***GOOD*** IN YOU.

"YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST TO BECOME SICK OF THE ***UNCERTAINTY*** THAT PLAYS THROUGH THE LIVES OF MANKIND.

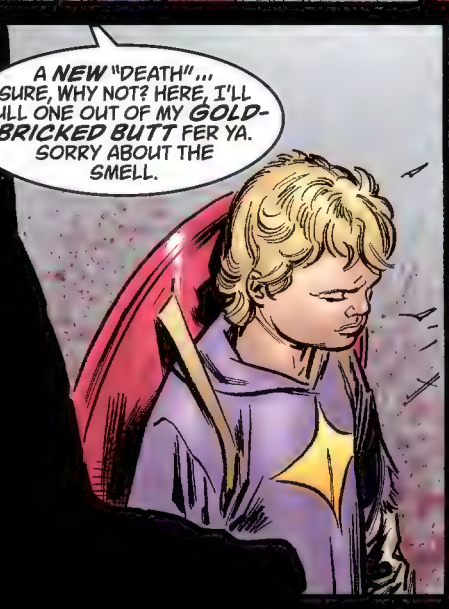
"SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO BE CERTAIN IF WE CAN EVEN KNOW ***ANYTHING.***"

"I'LL TELL YA, MARV. THE HULK WOULD'A ***LOST*** IF YA HADN'T'A MADE ME BRING YA DOWN HERE. THE HULK'S TENDER LITTLE ***KNEES*** JUST COULDN'T HOLD UP ALL'A REED'S ***DOOHICKEYS.***

"I'M THE ***STRONGEST.*** I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN. THE HULK'S JUST GOT ***BETTER P.R.***

"BY THE WAY, WHY'RE WE HERE? I ***HATE*** HOSPITALS. IF I HAD MY WAY, YA WOULDN'T CATCH ME ***DEAD*** IN ONE."

"THAT'S JUST THE PROBLEM, BEN. NO ONE IS ***DYING*** IN THEM ANYMORE."



HEY, IT'S DOC STRANGE! IF EVER WE NEEDED SOME MYSTIC MUMBO-JUMBO, IT'S NOW!
A NEW "DEATH" IS COMIN' UP FASTER'N YOU CAN SAY THE HOOZY HOSTESS OF HOSSENFRASS!
YO, DOC, CAN YA SCARE UP A NEW BOOBONIT PLAGUE ER SOMETHIN' TA MAKE ALL THESE PEOPLE FEEL BETTER? OR TA MAKE THEM FEEL NOTHIN' AT ALL? I MEAN... AW, NERTS.
BEN?
BEN, I UNDERSTAND...BUT I AM SORRY BECAUSE I CANNOT HELP YOU NOW. I'M OFF TO JAPAN WITH THOR, LOKI, ADAM AND EVE. XEN IS AIDING ME IN THE RESCUE OF MY BRIDE.
THAT'S GOOD, STEPHEN. I QUESTION WHAT WE'VE DONE. THESE PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING. I NEVER WANTED THIS. AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE NEW PARADISE.
I KNOW, BUT THERE'S MORE TO THIS THAN I THINK YOU REALIZE. COME WITH ME.
FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, ADAM, I'M SORRY. I WOULD HAVE NEVER WANTED THIS. HOW WAS I TO KNOW WHAT KILLING DEATH WOULD CAUSE?
DON'T TALK TO ME, MAR-VELL. MY WIFE AND I HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH BY YOUR WORDS AND PLANS.
HEY, IT'S DAZZLER. DAZZ, HOW'RE YOU FEELING?
I SHOULD BE DEAD, BEN. I SHOULDN'T BE FEELING ANYTHING.
YOU'LL FORGIVE ME, ALLISON, IF I HYPNOTIZE YOU...I WANT THEM TO HEAR THIS AS YOU EXPERIENCED IT.
...
...OKAY... IF YOU CAN HELP ME FORGET WHAT HAPPENED, I... PLEASE DO IT.
OF COURSE.

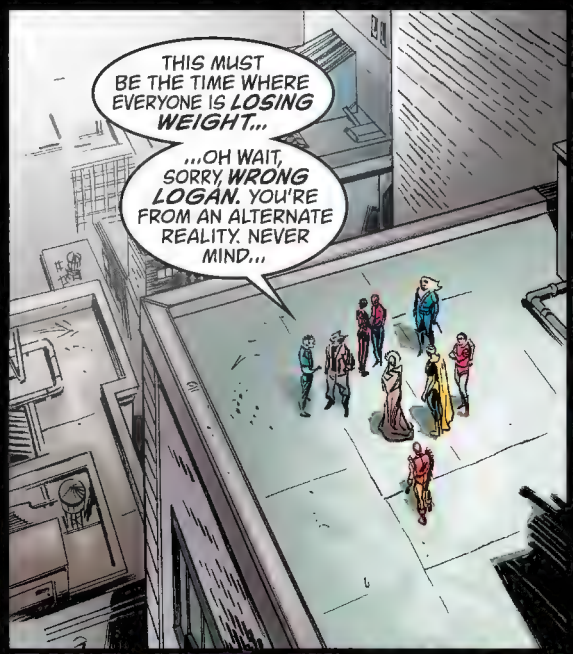
TELL US WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY. BUT DISTANCE, MY DEAR. DISTANCE. DON'T EXPERIENCE WHAT HAPPENED, EXPLAIN IT. TELL ME WHAT YOU SAW THAT DAY...
IT WAS THE REUNION TOUR... I WAS SINGING MY HEART OUT IN THIS CUTE LITTLE DISCO IN L.A....
...A MAN CAME ON STAGE AND TOLD ME THAT THERE WERE BETTER WAYS.
THEN HE THRUST HIS HAND ...OH GOD!
HE...HE TOOK MY HEART. HE TOOK IT OUT.
DISTANCE. LOOK AT IT AS IF YOU WERE WATCHING FROM BEHIND A MIRROR. YOU WILL REMEMBER NOTHING OF WHAT HAPPENED, MY DEAR...ONLY THAT YOU WERE IN AN ACCIDENT.
SLEEP NOW, DEAR ALLISON.
IT WAS MEPHISTO.
IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, HE IS THE CAUSE OF MOST OF THOSE HERE.
BUT WHY?
WHEN MEPHISTO BELIEVED HE WAS THE DEVIL, HIS GREATEST TEMPTATION WAS NOT THAT OF BEING GOOD, AS IN THE CASE OF LOKI HERE...
...BUT OF DOING BODILY HARM TO THOSE THAT, BEFORE, HE COULD ONLY BE SATISFIED BY THE CORRUPTION OF THEIR SOULS.

I'M AFRAID, GENTLEMEN, THAT THIS NEW DEVIL IS BRINGING WITH HIM A VERY NEW KIND OF ETERNAL DAMNATION. A LIVING KIND.
IF YOU WANT TO END THE SUFFERING THAT IS GROWING HERE, STOP HIM.
BUT HE COULD BE ANYBODY!
YES, HE COULD... BUT HE STILL WANTS TO BE GOD. HE'S JUST GETTING THERE IN A DIFFERENT WAY.
HOW DO YOU MEAN?
IT'S AN OLD TIBETAN PROVERB... KILL ONE MAN AND YOU ARE A MURDERER. KILL THOUSANDS, AND YOU ARE A KING. KILL THEM ALL, AND YOU ARE GOD.
OUR PARADISE IS EXPANDING ACCORDING TO MY WILL. THANK YOU, MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL FRIENDS.
YOUR INVITATION TO THE MASSES THAT STILL INHABIT THE REALM OF THE DEAD IS MEETING WITH GREAT SUCCESS.
THEY ARE BEING BROUGHT OUT OF DARKNESS INTO THIS GLORIOUS NEW LIGHT.
OUR HEAVEN IS GROWING EVERY DAY.
SIR, WE HAVEN'T FOUND ANYONE NEW IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD...
...ONLY THOSE NOT QUICK ENOUGH TO IMMEDIATELY RESPOND TO YOUR CALL. IT'S AS IF NO ONE ON EARTH IS DYING.

ARE YOU CERTAIN? HAVE YOU EXHAUSTED THE BOUNDARIES OF THE REALM OF THE DEAD SO SOON?
NO...
THEN PERHAPS NO ONE ON EARTH IS DYING AND PEACE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED AT LAST.
CONTINUE YOUR GOOD WORKS. DO NOT FEAR.
SOMETHING IS WRONG. ACCORDING TO SCOTT, WHO IS STILL ALIVE AND ON EARTH, NO ONE IS DYING...AND THEY SHOULD BE. THEY ARE BEING TORMENTED.
BUT WHY WOULD SOMEONE WHO IS OMNISCIENT DECEIVE US?
WE AREN'T A JURY OF MAR-VELL'S PEERS...BUT I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF HEAVEN BEING AN INDIVIDUAL'S WISH FULFILLMENT.
I THINK WE'RE ALL IN AGREEMENT THAT SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG IN THIS NEW PARADISE.
THE QUESTION IS, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

"I KNOW, KYLE, THAT YOU ARE WELL AWARE OF THE DEEPEST WISHES OF MY HERALDS, THE WISHES THEY THEMSELVES DARED NOT EVEN ASK FOR.
"SO WHAT DID SPIDER-GIRL REALLY WANT WHEN SHE ASKED TO SEE HER FATHER?"
"TO BE WHOLE, AARON. THAT IS ALL. TO BE CERTAIN THAT SHE DID NOT MISS SOMETHING."
SO YOU SAY YOU WERE HERALDS ON A MISSION TO SAVE THE ALTERNATE REALITIES FROM THE CELESTIALS...AND THAT THIS SPIDER-GIRL WANTED TO SEE ME AND THAT WAS HER FONDEST WISH?
THAT'S ABOUT IT, PARKER.
ONLY IN NEW YORK, YA KNOW? STILL, IT COULD BE WORSE. IT USUALLY IS WITH ME.
I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO BRING AN END TO THIS--WHAT WE CALL ON THE FORCE--DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE.
WE HAD A LADY CALL UP THE PRECINCT THE OTHER DAY COMPLAINING ABOUT SPIDERS IN HER KITCHEN.
SGT. CAGE LAUGHED FOR THE REST OF THE DAY WHEN HE SENT ME OUT ON THE CALL.
DON'T WORRY 'BOUT IT, 'PUTER. PARKER ONCE TOLD ME THAT HE HAS SOMETHING CALLED A SPIDER-SENSE THAT WARNS HIM OF ANY REAL DANGER.
YER WRONG ABOUT THIS ONE. I'M TELLING YA, YER...YEAH...YEAH... SHUT UP, 'PUTER. I GOT EYES.
UH... GIRLS?
GIRLS?
GIRLS!?!

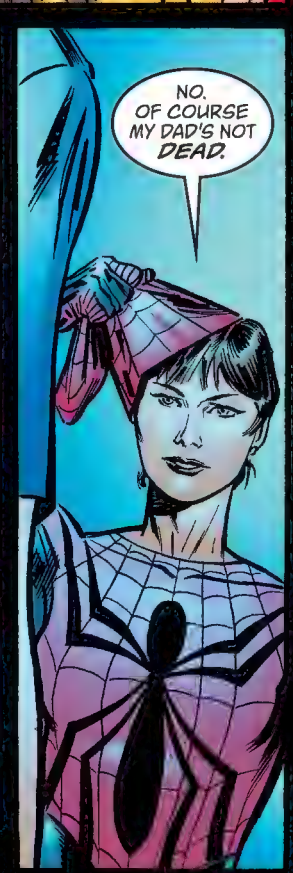
YER RIGHT, 'PUTER. THEY DO LOOK LIKE A SPIDER.
I...UH... THINK WE'RE STUCK UP HERE.
IS IT SAFE TO SAY "OW," NOW?
OH, DAD.
YOU SAID "DAD"?!
THEN THAT MEANS...
...SISTERS?
SISTERS!!!
SOME-TIMES I JUST HATE BEING RIGHT ALL THE TIME.

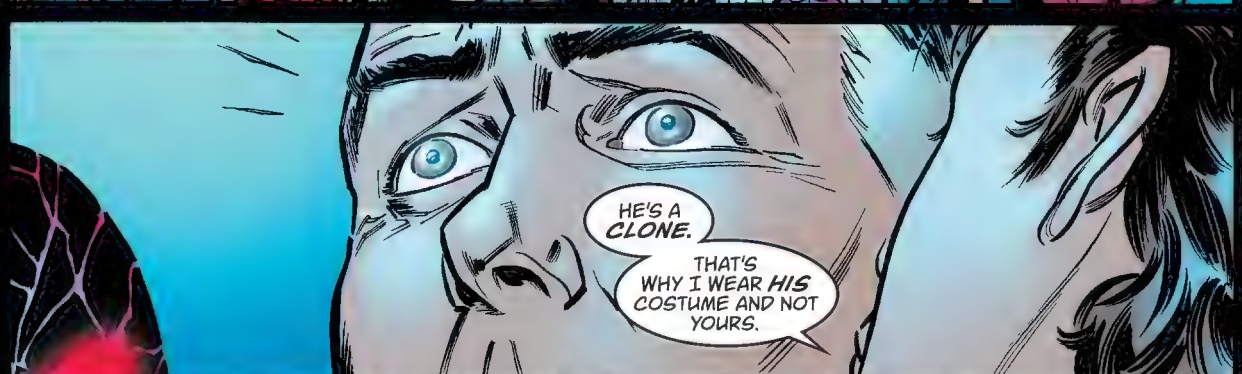

THIS MUST BE THE TIME WHERE EVERYONE IS LOSING WEIGHT...
...OH WAIT, SORRY, WRONG LOGAN. YOU'RE FROM AN ALTERNATE REALITY. NEVER MIND...

I'M SORRY... BUT I CANNOT BEAR THIS ANOTHER MOMENT...IF THERE IS A CURE FOR ME HERE, I CAN'T WAIT A MINUTE LONGER. WE HAVE TO LEAVE.
OF COURSE. THE SOONER YOU'RE SATISFIED, THE SOONER MY DESIRES CAN BE FULFILLED.
LEAVE? NOOO...YOU CAN'T LEAVE! NOT NOW!

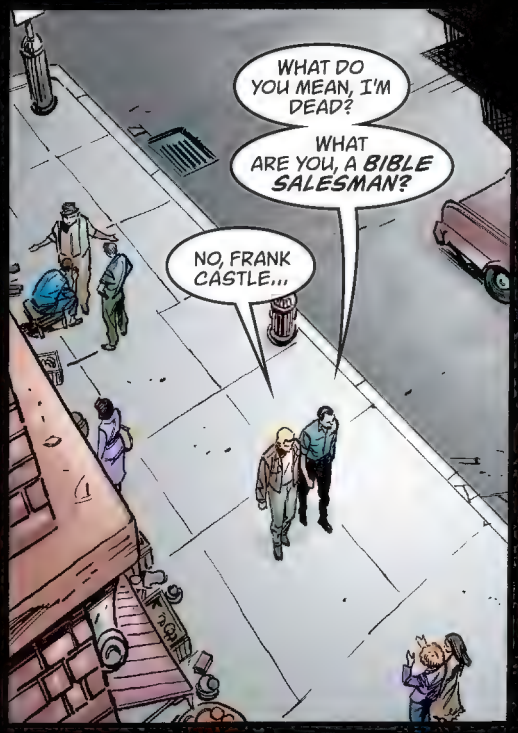
YOU HAVE TO STAY HERE. YOU CAN STAY WITH DAD AND ME...IN MY ROOM. YOU CAN...
OKAY, I'LL STAY.
NEW YORK SHERIFF DEPT

TELL ME THOUGH, WHY WAS YOUR WISH TO SEE ME? AM I DEAD ON YOUR WORLD?
PARKER


NO. OF COURSE MY DAD'S NOT DEAD.

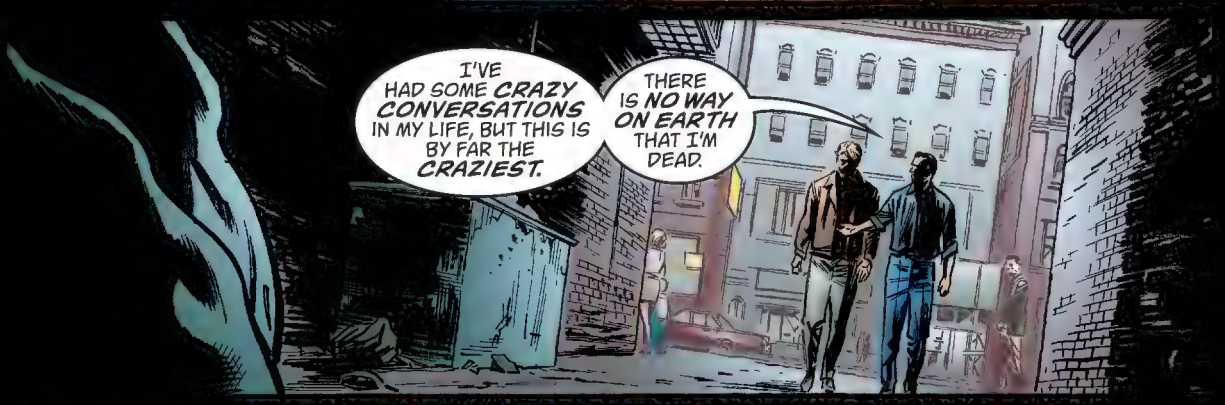

HE'S A CLONE.
THAT'S WHY I WEAR HIS COSTUME AND NOT YOURS.

"WHY HAVE THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY COME TO EARTH, KYLE?"
"I DON'T EVEN THINK THEY KNEW WHAT IT WAS THEY WERE LOOKING FOR, AARON. NOT UNTIL YOU TOLD THEM ABOUT BLACK BOLT AND THE TERRIGEN MISTS.
"THAT'S WHY THEY WENT TO THE HIDDEN LAND, AARON. THAT'S WHY THEY ARE THERE WITH KARNAK, NOW."
"THEY MUST WANT TO MUTATE SOMETHING... BUT WHAT? THEY WON THE WAR WITH THE BADOON...
"...THEY SAVED THE GALAXY FROM KORVAC IN BOTH THE PAST AND THE FUTURE. WHY WOULD THEY WANT THE TERRIGEN MISTS?"
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
HOW DID YOU WIPE US OUT IN SECONDS? WE'VE TAKEN ON ENTIRE ARMADAS OF THE BADOON!
I CAN ISOLATE THE FLAW IN ANYTHING. I SEE YOUR WEAKNESSES EASIER THAN I SEE YOUR FACE.
BUT I CAN SEE OTHER THINGS, AS WELL. YOU DID NOT COME HERE TO ASK ME ABOUT MYSELF.
YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE POWER WE HAVE. I CAN SEE YOUR HUNGER.
WE "PURE" INHUMANS ARE A PEOPLE THAT YEARS AGO WERE MUTATED BY A RACE KNOWN AS THE KREE.
WE WERE MUTATED TO BECOME SOLDIERS IN A WAR AGAINST AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE SKRULLS.
"MY ANCESTORS WERE MUTATED, AS WAS I, BY A GAS KNOWN AS THE TERRIGEN MISTS..."
THAT'S WHAT YOU CAME FOR, ISN'T IT? YOU WANT THE MISTS.
BUT YOU ALREADY HAVE POWER. WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?
WHA'D I MISS?
I'M SORRY TO TELL YOU, BUT THE MISTS ARE GONE...THEY WERE RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE BY MY KING.
THE PURITY OF MY RACE ENDS WITH THIS GENERATION, IT DIES WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY.
OUR BLOODLINE WILL BE FURTHER MUDDIED BY THE COMING MARRIAGE BETWEEN MEDUSA AND KING BRITAIN.
I AM THE ONLY INHUMAN WHO WON'T ATTEND THE QUEEN'S CEREMONY.
I AM THE ONLY MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY STILL LOYAL TO THE KING.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN, I'M DEAD?
WHAT ARE YOU, A BIBLE SALESMAN?
NO, FRANK CASTLE...

THIS PLACE IS A GHOST TOWN OF SORTS...IT'S HAUNTED BY YOUR MEMORIES AND THE MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO ONCE LIVED HERE.
YOU AND YOUR FAMILY DIED LONG AGO.

I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO HEAR THIS FROM ME. WE WERE BOTH SOLDIERS FOR A WHILE. WHEN WE LIVED, FRANK, WE WERE--


I'VE HAD SOME CRAZY CONVERSATIONS IN MY LIFE, BUT THIS IS BY FAR THE CRAZIEST.
THERE IS NO WAY ON EARTH THAT I'M DEAD.

BUT THIS ISN'T EARTH, FRANK. IT'S CALLED THE REALM OF THE DEAD. I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY TO PARADISE.
BUT I CAN SEE YOU'RE NOT READY YET.

YOU DON'T QUITE BELIEVE.
I'LL COME BACK AGAIN, FRANK. PREPARE YOUR FAMILY FOR THE NEW HEAVEN UNTIL THEN.
NEW HEAVEN?
BUT I HAVE MY FAMILY HERE...I'VE GOT HEAVEN ALREADY.
YOU'RE WRONG, MR. ROGERS...MR. ANGEL. THERE'S NOTHING THAT WOULD MAKE ME WANT TO TAKE MY FAMILY FROM THIS PLACE.
DO YOU THINK HE SUSPECTS ANYTHING?
NO. HE WOULDN'T RECOGNIZE US IF HE KNEW WE WERE HERE.
HE DOESN'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT HE DID TO MY FACE.

HE WENT DOWN THIS WAY!
WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?
BECAUSE WE WANT TO KILL YOU.
OVER AND OVER AGAIN.
AND THEN WE'LL MOVE ON TO YOUR FAMILY.
YOU JUST SAID THE WRONG THING.

DON'T YOU EVER THREATEN MY FAMILY!

NOT MY FAMILY.
NEVER.

NEVER SAY NEVER, FRANKIE-BOY.

NEVER!

NEVER!

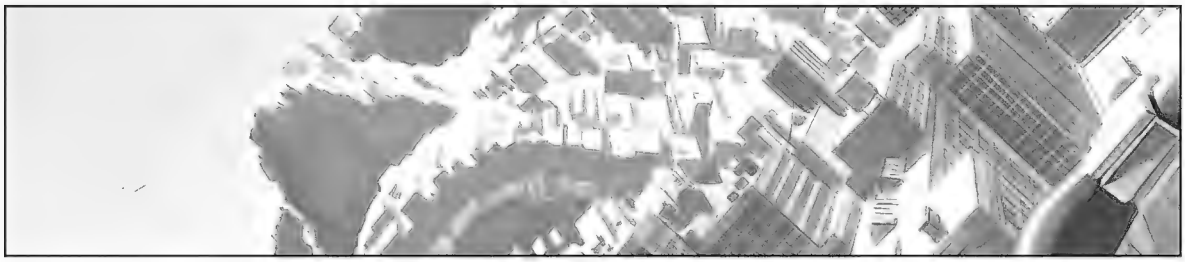
KILL ME OVER AND OVER AGAIN, HUH?
NOTHING GETS BETWEEN ME AND MY FAMILY.
NEVER AGAIN.
AGAIN? WHY DID I SAY THAT?
LET THE PUNISHMENT BEGIN...

"...DID THE BIG RED, WHITE AND BLUE ANGEL WANT TO TAKE YOU TO HEAVEN WITH HIM, FRANK? WAS THAT IT? TOO BAD HE LEFT YOU HERE."
IT CONSUMED ONE OF THE BROKEN MOONS THIS MORNING, BLASTAAR.
I KNOW. THIS IS RICHARDS' FAULT. IT HAS TO BE. HE USED THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER ON SOMETHING BIG, SOMETHING HE SHOULDN'T HAVE, AND TRANSPORTED IT HERE.
THIS CANCER WILL DESTROY US IF IT CONTINUES TO GROW.
RICHARDS HAS BROKEN HIS OATH TO THIS REALM. HE HAS SHATTERED THE PEACE.
I WILL KILL HIM FOR THIS!

IT'S BEEN HERE IN CANADA ALL THE TIME, MAC.
THIS LAST YEAR HAS NOT BEEN WASTED.
NOT FOR YOU, MAYBE.
THIS RACE SEEMS TO BE INCAPABLE OF BEING MUTATED... IT'S MIRACULOUS.
IT'S PURE.
I'M WAITING, WALTER.
ARE YOU CERTAIN IT UNDERSTANDS WHAT IT'S DOING FOR ITS COUNTRY?
THEY ARE EITHER ANIMALS, AND THEREFORE WITHOUT THE CELESTIAL SEED THAT WAS GERMINATED WITHIN ALL MANKIND...
...OR PERHAPS THEY ARE A DIVERGENT STRAIN OF HUMANITY ALTOGETHER. I MUST SPEAK WITH REED RICHARDS ABOUT THIS.
HOW'S THE NEW BODY FEEL, MAC?

GROOVY.
ALPHA FLIGHT IS BACK IN ACTION.
"There are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep." — Rene Descartes

P A R A D I S E X



APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

BELASCO

"I apologize for waiting so long. I should have come sooner, helped you sooner."

"Who's that? Oh it's you. I haven't seen you since the Savage Land, since I learned…"

"…that you weren't Belasco alone, but also Kurt Wagner, the manipulated pawn of Mephisto?"

"…"

"Kurt?"

"…"

"…yes, before I was manipulated by Mephisto and sent unknowingly back in time to strike at the X-Men in the form of a demon from Hell."

"I want to talk to you, Kurt, I want to help you understand what has happened to you."

"I know what's happened to me. I don't want be reminded."

"You don't need to be reminded, Kurt. You damn yourself with this story every waking moment. That's why you've made your home in Hell's Kitchen, New York. I don't want to make you relive it, I want to offer you a perspective on what has happened these last three years, a perspective that may allow you to understand not only the amazing things that have happened, but your place within it."

"You sound like Xavier."

"Do I?"

"It really doesn't matter. I have heard all of this before."

"Of course you have. We all have. Over and over again."

"What are you talking about?"

"There was once a time, Kurt, when all of time was linear. There was a point when time began. And then after a period of measured existence, it ceased to be. This is your belief, Kurt. You were…are...a Catholic."

"I take things like that on faith, X-51. Sometimes that means I don't have to torture myself thinking about it."

"I want to tell you something about your powers, Kurt, something about the nature of your ability to teleport from one place to another."

"What."

"Your power is a linear time-based power."

"I don't understand."

"For a moment, don't think of time as something to be measured by minutes and seconds, Kurt. Think of it as a measure of distance. When you teleport from one place to another in an instant, you travel from one point to another as if there were no time to pass between them."

"So?"

"So this means that you have always, to a degree, had a command over time. Mephisto knew this. He knew you manipulated time regardless of whether you were aware of it or not."

"I'm afraid that this is all quite beyond me. Look at me. I'm a demon, not a student of geometry."

"Has your appearance changed so much, Kurt, from what you were? Apart from basic color, it is only the arm you lost when the Grey Gargoyle trapped part of you in stone that has changed your appearance. Reed Richards too has lost an arm. He too has been changed by circumstance. He too was manipulated by Mephisto."

"That's easy for you to say, robot. You have no past life to compare your current one to."

"That's not true, Kurt. I did have a 'past' life. I had a face once—one the man who built me created for me to wear. It gave me humanity. I called that man father. In all honesty, I've had my humanity taken from me in ways you have not."

"Is that what you believe? From what you say, it wasn't a real face in the first place. I was tricked into committing evil, manipulated into becoming the enemy of my friends. It didn't matter how I looked, it was about what I became."

"Then don't call yourself demon if indeed you are just a victim of Mephisto's tricks."

"You…you're right."

"I reminded you that my humanity cannot be defined by

a plastic face, or in your case, a hue. You're not a demon, Kurt. You never were. Not even when you thought yourself to be Belasco. You don't have to play the victim. Xavier taught you this when you only thought yourself to be a mutant. He didn't want mutants to be victims, but to claim their rights. You don't have to play the victim of Mephisto now. If you do, he'll still be controlling your actions and you will never be free of him."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to rejoin the world. An old friend of yours, Brian Braddock, is marrying soon. You should go and celebrate with him."

"Very well. But I want to know something. Mar-Vell showed me what happened, how I almost died from the loss of my arm, how Mephisto transformed me into Belasco, the villain, and convinced me that I was Belasco, servant of the Dark Gods. But there's more to this. I know there is."

"You were no villain. When Captain America and the Mar-Vell child traveled to the Savage Land and Limbo to collect Anti-Metal to structure the new Paradise, they came upon your body. It had been frozen in ice, in Limbo, a realm constructed out of the infinities created by a time machine."

"Mar-Vell told me all of this. He showed me how Mephisto came to me after my arm had been lost in stone. I saw how I was encased in ice, how I was transformed into Belasco. But how can you say I was no villain?"

"Because even as a demon, you were drawn to saving the X-Men as much as Mephisto pushed you to damn them."

"I don't understand."

"There was a child once, a girl, Colossus' sister."

"Illyana."

"Illyana. Have you ever asked yourself why you took her from the X-Men and raised her in Limbo?"

"Mephisto told me it was to take advantage of Colossus, to use his weaknesses against him instead of pitting myself against him, to attack his heart in a way that got through his impenetrable steel skin."

"Mephisto would say that, Kurt. But the truth is that you knew you were repeating a history you had already experienced."

"I don't understand."

"Some people call it déjà vu. The sense that everything has happened before. You knew there would come a day when a virus would kill Illyana, a virus that attacked only those for whom the mutant seed had been germinated. You also knew that there would come another day when Peter Rasputin would die himself to find a cure for that same virus. Yes, you thought yourself a demon, but answer me this, why would a demon teach a child the power over life and death? Why would a demon unconsciously arm a child with the ability to escape death once she'd succumbed to it, and with the ability to save a brother who himself had died?"

"What are you saying, that Illyana is still alive?"

"Perhaps, I don't know. I cannot see her on Earth, but have not heard mention of her in the Realm of the Dead, either. Perhaps she is in Limbo now, hiding from a reality she cannot understand, nor wants to."

"I know how she feels."

"But Peter Rasputin is alive again. How was he brought back to life?"

"I don't know."

"Yes. Yes you do. You taught Illyana how to escape from Death's Realm. You taught her how to rescue her brother when he'd died as well."

"But that goes against even the power Mephisto has. How could I possibly know how to do that?"

"Because, Kurt, Mephisto didn't save you from death. He brought you back after you'd already died."

"That's crazy. How could I come back from the dead?"

"Isn't that the central belief of your faith, Kurt? That such a miracle is possible?"

"Yes, but not like this. Please, how could you even come to suspect this?"

"I have a friend, one who can see both in this world and those still to come. He told me that you died.

"What Mephisto learned was that the dead could be reanimated if their bodies were not destroyed first. This knowledge was passed on to you, Kurt, as it is to everyone who returns from the dead."

"But why? Why would Mephisto give the knowledge to me of how to get in and out of the Realm of the Dead?"

"He didn't. You just remembered the way back, and the way in. According to Kyle, he's the friend I told you about, there are points between every cycle of time that Mephisto knows how to cross into."

"You mean like secret passageways?"

"Exactly. It is at these points that one recycled reality meets another. Like a labyrinth."

"And Mephisto knows the way into each of these realms?"

"He does."

"How? Does he just have the knowledge or does he have a map?"

"I don't know. Maybe there's a map."

"So why are you telling me this?"

"One, because I wanted you to know that when you were transported back in time, you helped Mephisto create another reality for him to escape into. He encourages people in their despair to create alternate realities that he can escape into. I was hoping you'd be willing to help me stop him."

"What's he running from?"

"God, or at least what he thought existed to judge him at the end of linear time."

"I have one more question."

"What?"

"I died and was brought back and manipulated time just like Mephisto hoped I would. But technically, Illyana and Peter have the same knowledge I do. And, they had access to Limbo. We may not know where Illyana is, but why didn't Peter ever use his knowledge and Limbo to manipulate time?"

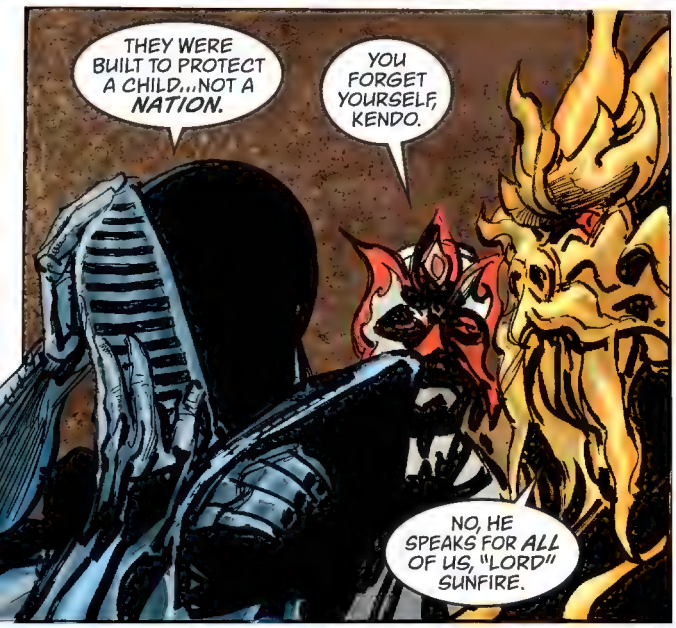
"Who says he didn't?"

PARADISE X: XEN

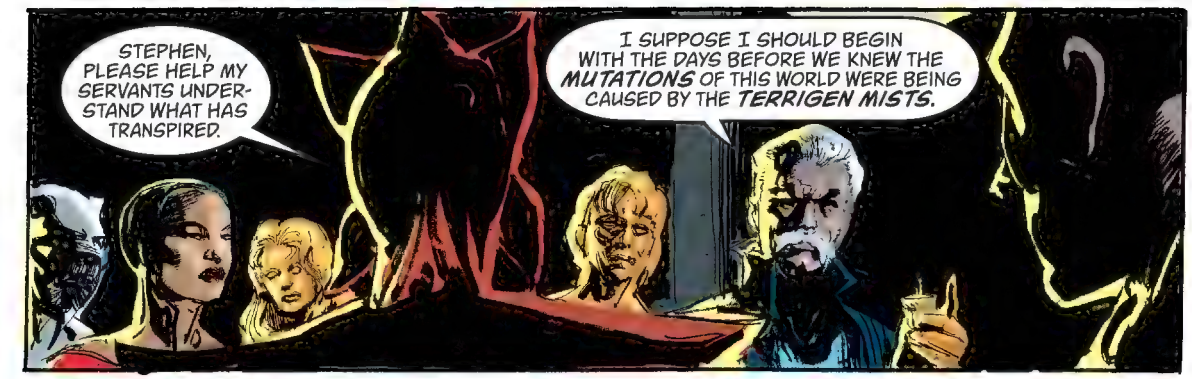
THIS IS MY WORLD. I MADE IT. IT IS THE RESULT OF MY CONCEPTION.
MY GOLDEN REALM. MY ASGARD.
IT IS PEOPLED WITH THE SWEAT OF MY INSPIRATION.
IT HAS BEEN FED AND NOURISHED WITH THE FRUIT OF MY HOPES.
IF IT WERE NOT FOR ME, THERE WOULD BE NOTHING HERE.
I AM ODIN. I REPEAT IT OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND NEVER TIRE OF HEARING IT.
I AM THE KING WHO SEES ALL.
HE WHO HAS GIVEN FORM TO EVERYTHING.
I SAID LET THERE BE...AND IT WAS. AND IT WAS GOOD.
THIS IS ASGARD. AND THERE IS BUT ONE GOD HERE.

TO THINK I EVER THOUGHT I WAS A MASTER OF ANYTHING.
I SLEPT THROUGH MY OWN DEATH.
CLEA HAD AN AFFAIR WITH THE NORSE GOD OF MISCHIEF.
AND WONG CAME HERE FOR HIS FINAL ACT OF BETRAYAL.
HERE. TO JAPAN.
THANK YOU, LORD SUNFIRE.
OF COURSE, STEPHEN. THE HOUSE OF YOSHIDA WILL ALWAYS BE AN ALLY TO THE GREAT EASTERN MAGICIAN.
WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED BY YOUR RETURN FROM THE DEAD. AS HAS THE WORLD.
THANK YOU. I KNOW WHAT I'M ASKING OF YOU. I KNOW THE RISK. AND I WOULD UNDERSTAND IF YOU FELT IT WAS TOO MUCH.
MY FATHER ONCE MADE A PACT WITH THE HEROES OF THIS WORLD, STEPHEN. MOST CAME FROM YOUR COUNTRY. IT WAS A PROMISE HE SAW THROUGH UNTIL HIS ASSASSINATION.
CAN I... CAN WE DO ANY LESS?
WE WILL HELP YOU SAVE HER, STEPHEN. WE WILL SAVE YOUR CLEA.

AND, IN OUR ABSENCE, THE SEVEN SILVER SAMURAI WILL PROTECT THIS NATION. THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR.
TONY STARK BUILT THE SEVEN SILVER SAMURAI TO BE LORD SUNFIRE'S BODYGUARDS.
THEIR TRUE WORTH WILL BE PUT TO THE TEST IN THE ABSENCE OF THIS NATION'S CHAMPIONS.


THEY WERE BUILT TO PROTECT A CHILD...NOT A NATION.
YOU FORGET YOURSELF, KENDO.
NO, HE SPEAKS FOR ALL OF US, "LORD" SUNFIRE.

I DON'T CARE MUCH FOR YOUR SARCASM, BANZAI. AND KENDO DOES NOT SPEAK FOR ALL OF YOU...I DO.
OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?



EVERYONE WAS MUTATED, EVEN MY LOYAL SERVANT WONG. I WAS BUT ONE OF THE MANY SCAPEGOATS THE WORLD HAD TURNED UPON.

NO ONE KNEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED...WHY EVERYONE WAS TRANSFORMING INTO BEASTS AND MONSTERS.

IT WOULD BE EASY TO SAY THAT THE MUTATION MADE HIM BETRAY ME, MUTATED HIS ALLEGIANCES, BUT THAT'S NOT EXACTLY TRUE.

"WONG'S MUTATION WAS HIDDEN FROM ME...

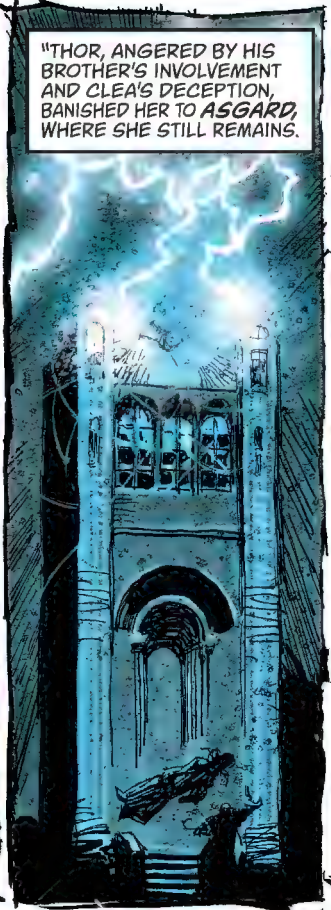
"...OR PERHAPS IT WAS ONLY THAT I WAS SO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE CHANGES OVERWHELMING MY FELLOW MAN."

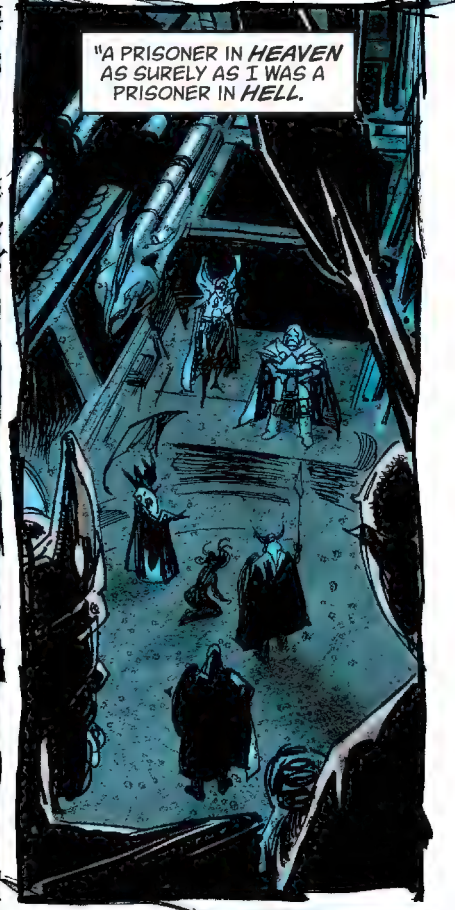
"WONG HAD A NEW MASTER.
"ONE WHO PROMISED HIM A WORLD OF HIS OWN TO RULE, LIKE HE HAD SO MANY OTHERS.
"ONE WHO CLAIMED TO UNDERSTAND THE FRUSTRATIONS OF BEING A SERVANT. OR A SON.
"MEPHISTO.
"WONG'S FIRST ACT OF OBEDIENCE TO MEPHISTO WAS TO DRAW CLEA'S AFFECTIONS AWAY FROM ME.
"I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT OVER ALL THE YEARS HE SERVED ME, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY TO LEARN SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS AN INFATUATION SPELL.
"LOKI WAS THE OBJECT OF CLEA'S NEW UNBRIDLED LUST, NOT YET AWARE OF THE MAGIC THAT CONTROLLED HIS OWN DESTINY."
IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WE HAVE ALL BEEN CURSED.
NO ONE IS A STRANGER TO DECEIT.

"HAVE YOU HEARD THE BELIEF THAT IF YOU DREAM YOUR OWN DEATH WHILE YOU SLEEP, YOU WILL NEVER WAKE UP?
"IT WAS A SIMPLE SPELL, REALLY."
I DESERVE MORE.
"SHE KILLED ME.
"RIGHT THROUGH THE HEART.
"I LOVED HER, YET ALWAYS ACTED AS IF SHE WERE NOTHING BUT MY APPRENTICE."

"PART OF WONG'S DILIGENCE WAS TO MAKE CERTAIN MY BODY SURVIVED.
"MEPHISTO COULDN'T RISK MY PHYSICAL DEATH.
"I WOULD HAVE THEN BEEN POWERFUL ENOUGH TO BE A REAL THREAT IN THAT REALM OF GHOSTS.
"AS IT WAS, I COULD DO NOTHING WHILE MY BODY STILL SURVIVED ON EARTH.
"SO WONG FED AND NOURISHED MY COMATOSE REMNANTS TO SUSTAIN MY USELESSNESS.
"IT WAS WONG WHO WAS NOW FORCED TO CARE FOR ME ONCE AGAIN.
"WONG HAD WANTED A WORLD OF HIS OWN... BUT THE DEVIL GAVE HIM BEDPAN DUTY."

"WHEN BRUCE BANNER CAME TO MY PRISON REALM IN SEARCH OF AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS RAISED IN HIS DREAMS, I REVEALED THE DECEPTION THAT TRAPPED ME THERE.
"AT LEAST WHAT I KNEW AT THE TIME...WONG'S FAUSTIAN AGENDA WAS HIDDEN EVEN FROM ME.


"THOR, ANGERED BY HIS BROTHER'S INVOLVEMENT AND CLEA'S DECEPTION, BANISHED HER TO ASGARD, WHERE SHE STILL REMAINS.


"A PRISONER IN HEAVEN AS SURELY AS I WAS A PRISONER IN HELL.

"I SAID EARLIER THAT WONG'S MUTATION WAS NOT TO BECOME EVIL OR PROUD. YOU REMEMBER HIM AS AN ALLY.
"AS A FRIEND.

"UNKNOWN TO ANYONE ON THIS PLANET, WONG WAS LIVING TWO LIVES.
"HE WAS A CONFIDANT TO XEN AS WELL AS THE RED RONIN IN THE TONG OF CREEL.
"A MAN OF TWIN PURPOSES."

"ADAM WARLOCK KILLED WONG SHORTLY AFTER HIS SECRET MUTATION WAS AT LAST REVEALED.
"WONG WAS BOTH OUR FRIEND AND ENEMY AT THE SAME TIME. PERHAPS THIS IS WHY I DIDN'T SENSE HIS BETRAYAL.
"FOR WHEN WONG SERVED ME, WHEN HE KEPT MY BODY ALIVE, HE WAS FAITHFUL AS EVER...JUST AS MEPHISTO KNEW HE WOULD BE.

SHALLA-BAL! IT'S YOU!
OH, NORRIN! I PROMISED YOU I'D BE HERE WAITING!
"BUT EVEN AFTER THE DEFEAT OF DEATH AND THE LIBERATION OF SOULS, MY STORY WAS STILL NOT OVER.
"THE NEW PARADISE THAT MAR-VELL PROMISED TO BUILD FOR THE DEAD WASN'T FOR ME TO SEE. MAR-VELL SENT ME BACK."

YOU WERE ALL WITNESSES TO MY RETURN. I DON'T THINK I HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW BADLY I NEEDED TO WAKE UP.
WE WERE ALL PAWNS IN MEPHISTO'S GAME, WE ALL HAD OUR PARTS TO PLAY.
I HAVE RETURNED TOO LATE TO SAVE WONG...

...BUT I WILL SAVE MY WIFE, REGARDLESS OF THE WRONG SHE'S DONE.
ANY QUESTIONS?

YEAH, YOU GONNA EAT THAT?

YOU UNDERSTAND, WE WILL REMAIN ***HIDDEN*** AND CANNOT SHOW OURSELVES IN ASGARD. TO DO SO WOULD BRING ODIN AND THE REST OF THE GOLDEN REALM DOWN UPON YOU.

ARE YOU READY, STEPHEN?

YES.

LET'S ***HOPE SO.***

WE FOUND OURSELVES IN A WORLD OF ***SNOW*** AND ***ICE.*** I WAS TEMPTED TO STOP, TO RETURN TO EARTH AND GIVE UP COMPLETELY, BUT I'D LIVED AS A ***GHOST*** FOR TOO LONG.

WE'RE HERE? THIS IS ***IT?*** IT'S ***SNOW?***

WE ARE IN ***JOTUNHEIM,*** THE MOUNTAINS BELOW THE GREAT CITY.

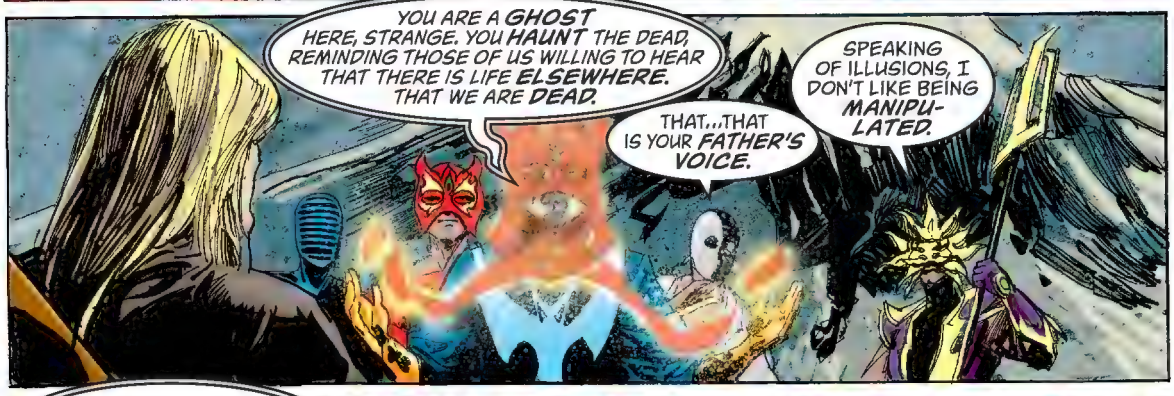
BELOW? ARE WE GOING TO THE CITY?

NO, MANTIS. ODIN WON'T KEEP CLEA IN THE CITY. HER MAGIC MIGHT ***INFECT*** THE ILLUSION.

WHAT ILLUSION?
EVERYTHING YOU SEE HERE IS AN ILLUSION.
EVERYTHING WE ARE DOING HERE WILL BE AN ATTEMPT TO WREST REALITY FROM LIE.

BEFORE WE CONTINUE, I THANK YOU FOR FOLLOWING ME THIS FAR.
WHAT STEPHEN FAILED TO MENTION WAS THAT HE MET MY FATHER IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD.

TELL THEM WHAT HE SAID, STEPHEN. SHOW THEM WHAT YOU SHOWED ME.


YOU ARE A GHOST HERE, STRANGE. YOU HAUNT THE DEAD, REMINDING THOSE OF US WILLING TO HEAR THAT THERE IS LIFE ELSEWHERE. THAT WE ARE DEAD.
THAT...THAT IS YOUR FATHER'S VOICE.
SPEAKING OF ILLUSIONS, I DON'T LIKE BEING MANIPULATED.

I HAVE BEEN A MAN OF MISPLACED PASSIONS AND HAVE FOUGHT FOR PEACE WHILE SECRETLY LONGING FOR WAR.
I HAVE A SON, BUT NO WIFE. I HAVE A BROKEN FAMILY AND WOULD DO ANYTHING TO RESTORE ANY MAN'S FAMILY, ONLY BECAUSE I NOW VALUE IT SO.

I KNOW MY FATHER. I HEAR HIM IN THOSE WORDS AS WELL AS HIS VOICE. OUR ROLE HERE, AS ON EARTH, IS THAT OF RESTORATION.
HONOR ME AS YOU WOULD HIM.
THE RESENTMENT XEN FEELS TOWARDS SUNFIRE DOESN'T NEED TO BE AUDIBLE TO BE HEARD. IT WAS LORD SUNFIRE WHO ELECTED TO HAVE WONG JOIN XEN.
IT WAS LORD SUNFIRE WHO BROUGHT THEM HERE.

THIS IS LIKE TIBET. SIR NAYLAND ONCE--
QUIET. WHERE THERE IS SNOW, THERE ARE SNOW GIANTS.
FOOD!
I KNEW I SMELLED SOMETHING! HARDLY ENOUGH TO FILL ONE BELLY, THOUGH.
IT'S ENOUGH! YOU COULD LOSE SOME WEIGHT, ANYHOW.
LOOK, THERE'S A MAGE AMONGST THEM!
WE CAN WAIT IN HERE UNTIL THEY GET BORED, LORD SUNFIRE...OR UNTIL WE CAN STRIKE BACK.
IN A WAY, STEPHEN, THIS IS ALMOST CHEATING.
I SUGGEST WE STRIKE QUICKLY AND NOT DRAW ATTENTION TO OURSELVES.
FINALLY!

I DON'T THINK WE CAN COVER THIS ONE UP, LOKI. FATHER *KNOWS* WHEN WE DIE. HE *ALLOWS* IT. LOOK AT BALDER...
THOR, DON'T CALL HIM *FATHER*. IT GIVES HIM STRENGTH...
...BROTHER.

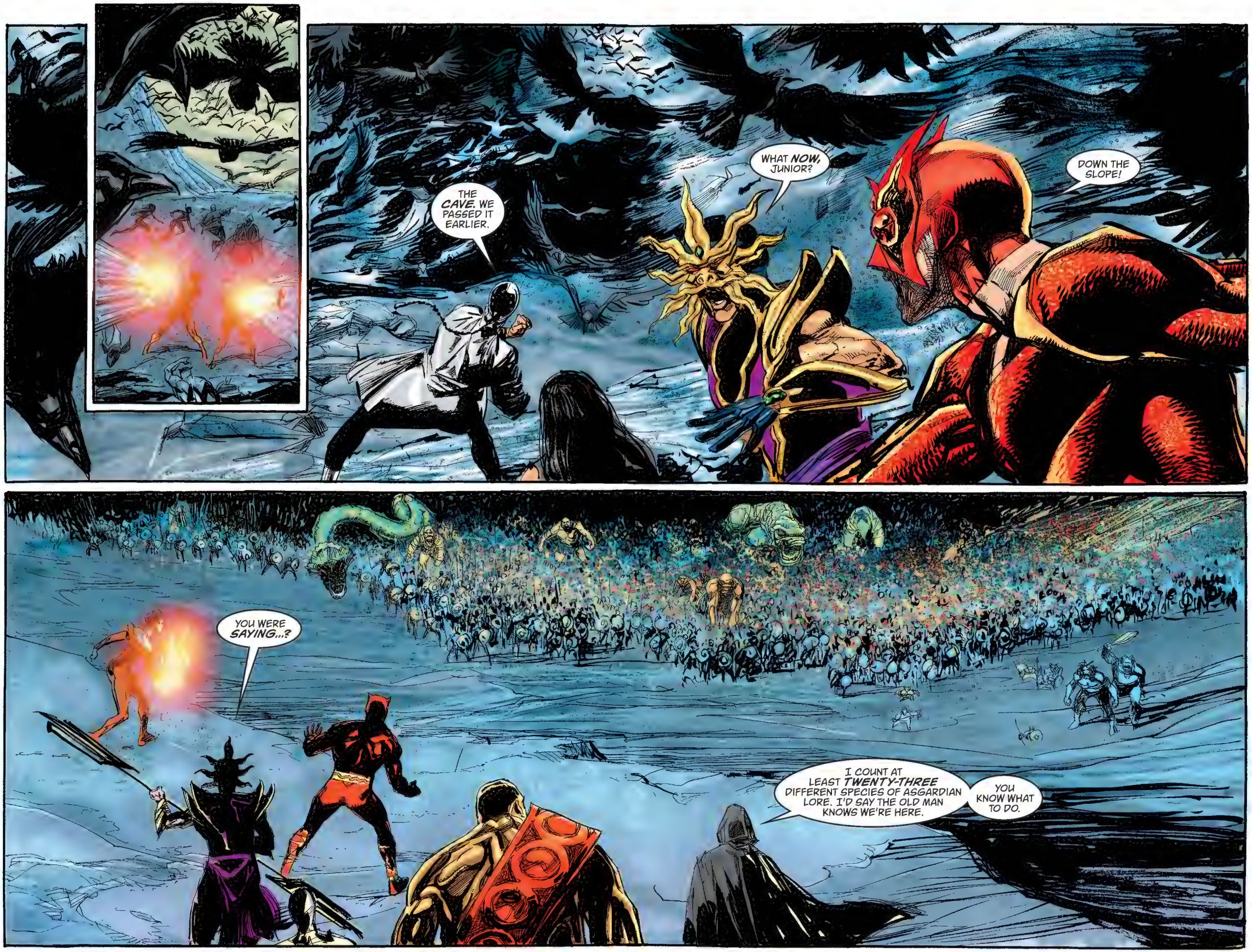
THIS ISN'T GOING WELL...
"...IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF WHEN HE FINDS OUT NOW, NOT IF."
"WE'D BETTER COVER THE BODIES IN THE SNOW AND HOPE, LOKI...
"...HOPE THAT THE BEING WHO GAVE US FORM AND SEES ALL ISN'T AWARE THAT A REBELLION IS GROWING IN HEAVEN."
WHITE TIGER--YOU HAVE POINT.
THERE IS NO SIGN OF DANGER, MY LORD SUNFIRE. YOU SHOULD WARM YOURSELVES.
TORA?
HAVE YOU SENSED CLEA'S PRESENCE YET, MAGICIAN?
NO.

IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT THESE SUPER-POWERED INDIVIDUALS WOULD FORM A TEAM. I KNEW WHO TAO WAS, BUT DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HIS MASK.
AND BANZAI WAS AMERICAN, NOT JAPANESE AT ALL. EACH HAD THEIR OWN MYSTERY, THEIR OWN ORIGIN OF MEMBERSHIP.
YOU AREN'T LIKE THE OTHERS, TORA. YOU'VE BEEN USING YOUR POWERS LONGER THAN MOST OF XEN.
HOW DID YOU COME TO ACQUIRE THEM?
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, TIGER, BUT WHEN WE START HEADING DOWN THE OTHER SIDE OF THESE PEAKS, I DON'T WANT SUMO BEHIND ME.
QUIET, BANZAI. I WANT TO GET THROUGH THIS AND RETURN HOME. I FEAR FOR JAPAN IN OUR ABSENCE.
MY FIRST MEMORIES, DOCTOR STRANGE, WERE OF BEING ON FIRE.
"I HAVE LEARNED THAT IT WAS THE MOMENT I WAS EXPOSED TO THE AIR THAT I BURST INTO FLAME.
"I NEED NOT TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MOTHER."
I HID IN THE IMPERIAL GARDENS FOR YEARS...
...AND I WOULD HAVE KILLED MYSELF IF IT WASN'T FOR THE AMERICAN.

WHAT AMERICAN?
"HIS NAME WAS JIM.
"HE SAID HE JUST WANTED TO TOUCH MY CHEEK.
"AND I...I WANTED HIM TO. I WANTED TO BE TOUCHED. IF ONLY FOR ONCE.
"BUT I WAS AFRAID OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM.
"HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO CONTROL WHAT I WAS. HOW TO BE A PERSON, AND NOT A MONSTER. HE FREED ME."

IN THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED, HAMMOND AND I WERE HUNTED THE WORLD OVER FOR OUR ATTACK ON THE NATION'S SENSE OF SECURITY.
THAT WAS YOU? YOU AND JIM HAD MORE ALLIES THAN JUST KING NAMOR, YOU KNOW.
THANK YOU. WE DIDN'T KNOW, BUT ALWAYS HOPED WHAT WE WERE DOING WAS FOR THE BEST.
STEPHEN... THERE IT IS. THAT'S ABOUT AS CLOSE AS WE'RE GOING TO GET TO ODIN'S PALACE.
YOU SAY THAT LIKE IT'S A BAD THING.
WHAT IS THAT CLOUD COMING OUT OF THE CITY?
THAT'S NOT A CLOUD, MANTIS...IT'S BIRDS. ODIN KNOWS WE'RE HERE.

IT WOULDN'T BE UNTIL MY RETURN TO EARTH THAT I LEARNED OF THE DANGER THAT STRUCK JAPAN THOSE MANY DAYS WE WERE SEARCHING FOR CLEA.
THE DEATH OF THE MANDARIN THOSE MANY MONTHS BEFORE HAD SET FREE THE VERY CREATURE THE MANDARIN'S RINGS HAD KEPT AT BAY.
THE GHOST OF THE DRAGON, FIN FANG FOOM.


THE CAVE. WE PASSED IT EARLIER.
WHAT NOW, JUNIOR?
DOWN THE SLOPE!
YOU WERE SAYING...?
I COUNT AT LEAST TWENTY-THREE DIFFERENT SPECIES OF ASGARDIAN LORE. I'D SAY THE OLD MAN KNOWS WE'RE HERE.
YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.

"SAVE THE WORLD."
THAT WAS THE CHARGE GIVEN TO THE SEVEN SILVER SAMURAI IN XEN'S ABSENCE.
BUT SAVE IT FROM WHAT? HOW COULD ANYONE SEE SOMETHING LIKE THIS COMING?

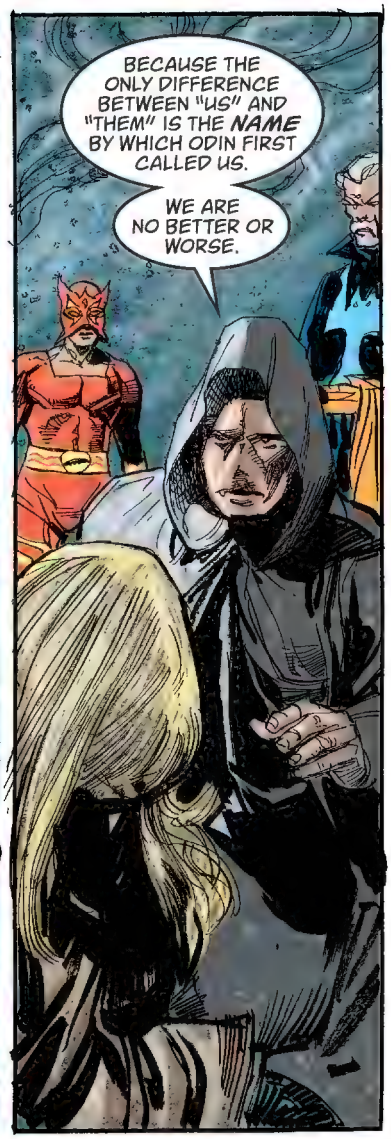
I'M ASSUMING WE DON'T HAVE TO HIDE OUR FEATURES ANYMORE.

YOU DID THIS, ODIN! YOU CALLED THIS DOWN! YOU MADE ME WANT TO BE WORTHY!

YOU SWORE THIS WOULD NEVER HAPPEN. YOU TOLD ME THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE.
I GAVE YOU WHAT YOU WANTED. THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE MY WORLD.

I GAVE YOU MY WORD.
GET OUT OF MY SEAT, MEPHISTO!
THINGS HAVE CHANGED, OLD MAN.
I AM NOT THE SAME AS I WAS.
FAR BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNEW.
YOU WILL LOSE YOUR KINGDOM IF YOU ARE NOT CAREFUL.

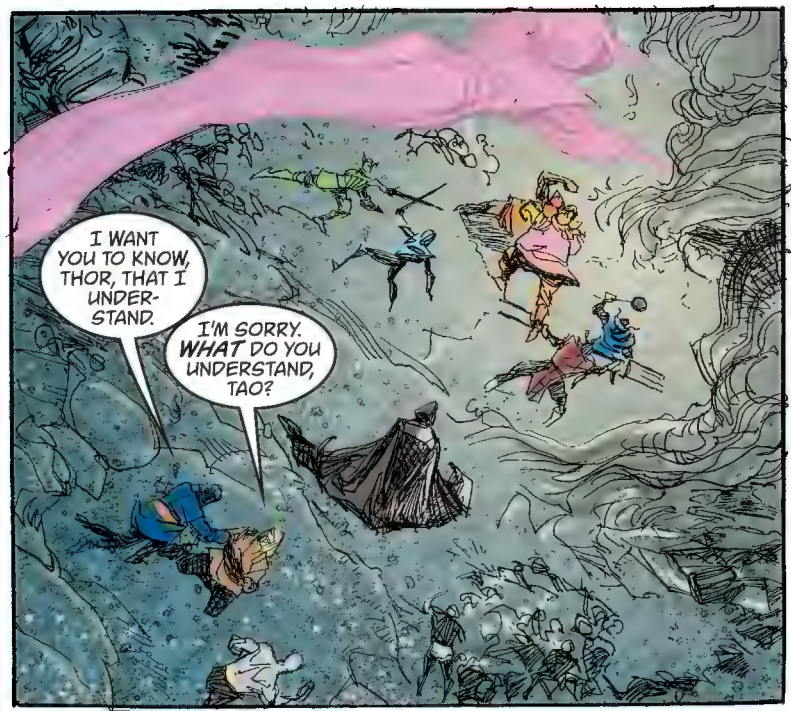
WHY SO SAD, THUNDERFIST? YOU FRIED 'EM GOOD.

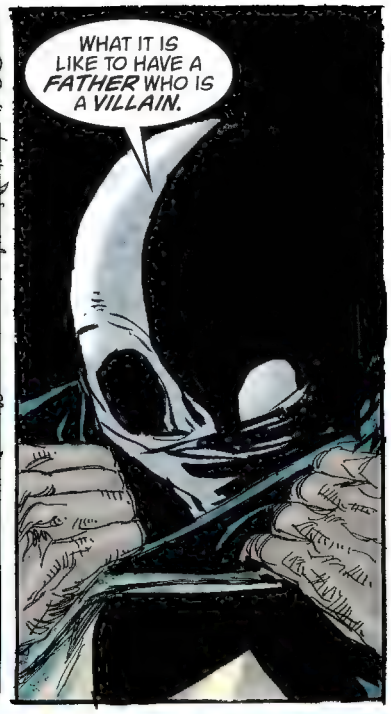

BECAUSE THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "US" AND "THEM" IS THE NAME BY WHICH ODIN FIRST CALLED US.
WE ARE NO BETTER OR WORSE.

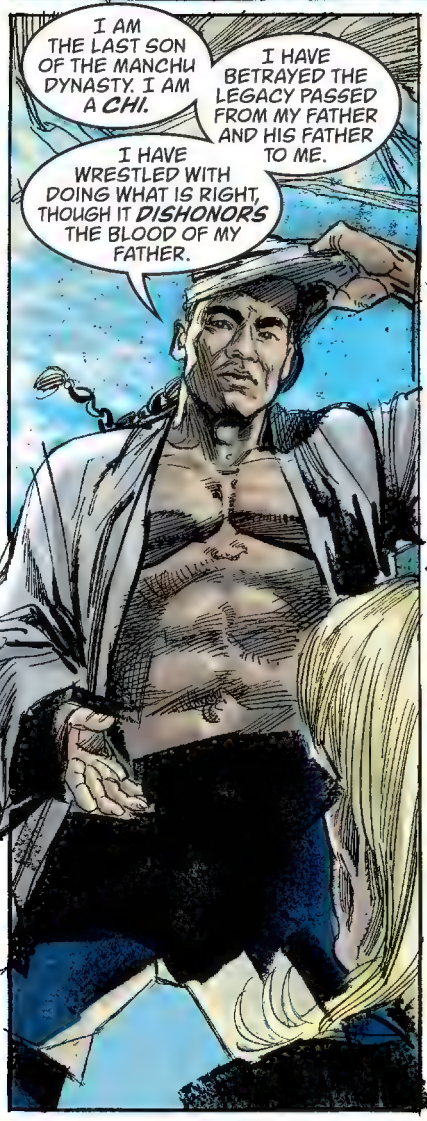
THIS ISN'T ON OUR HANDS, THOUGH. IT'S ODIN'S FAULT AND HE IS GOING TO PAY THE PRICE.

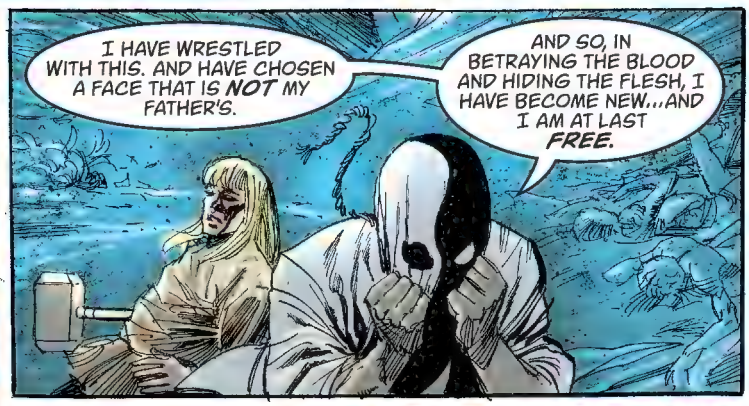
THOR?! METHINKS THOU ART BEWITCHED BY THY BROTHER'S POISONED TONGUE.
WELL SAID, VOLSTAGG.

COME! LET US DRINK AND TOAST THE CHARMS OF WENCHES USED AND DISCARDED!
MY FRIENDS...
REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE. THERE ARE NO WARRIORS THREE APART FROM THE ONES THAT FIRST LIVED IN ODIN'S IMAGINATION.
HOLD YOUR HAMMER... THIS ONE'S MINE.
OUT OF MY WAY, FATTY!
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS TERM "FATTY," BUT STAND THEE DOWN, MORTAL OF GIRTH, FOR THINE OWN VOLUME BE NO MATCH FOR THE GLORY AND THE ECSTASY OF MY VOLUMINOUSNESS!
IT HAD COME DOWN TO MOUNTAINS MOVING MOUNTAINS.
WE HAD COME TO A HEAVEN WITH MORE REASONS THAN RESCUE. LORD SUNFIRE HAD TO PROVE HIMSELF WORTHY OF LEADING MEN WHO MIGHT HAVE BECOME GODS.
THOR AND LOKI WERE ATTEMPTING TO CHANGE ALL THAT THEY WERE, ONLY BECAUSE SOMEONE OTHER THAN THEMSELVES HAD GIVEN THEM DEFINITION.
I HAD COME SEEKING TO LOVE THE WOMAN WHOSE LAST WORDS AND ACTIONS WERE MOTIVATED BY A MIX OF APATHY AND HATRED.
THAT'S WHAT WE WERE UP AGAINST. THAT'S WHAT WE WERE, MOUNTAINS UNWILLING TO BE MOVED IN OUR PURPOSE AND RESOLVE.

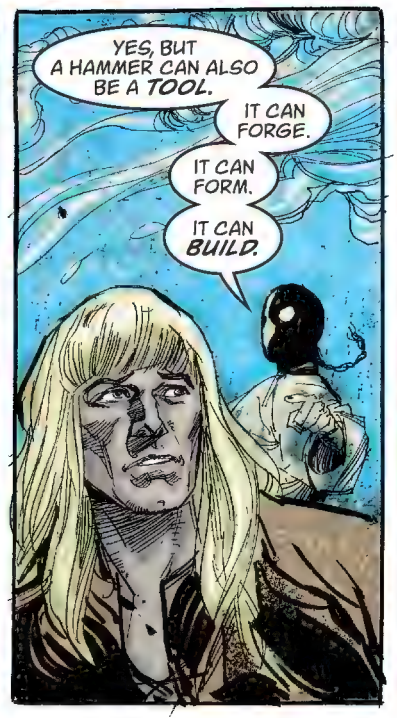

I WANT YOU TO KNOW, THOR, THAT I UNDER-STAND.
I'M SORRY. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND, TAO?

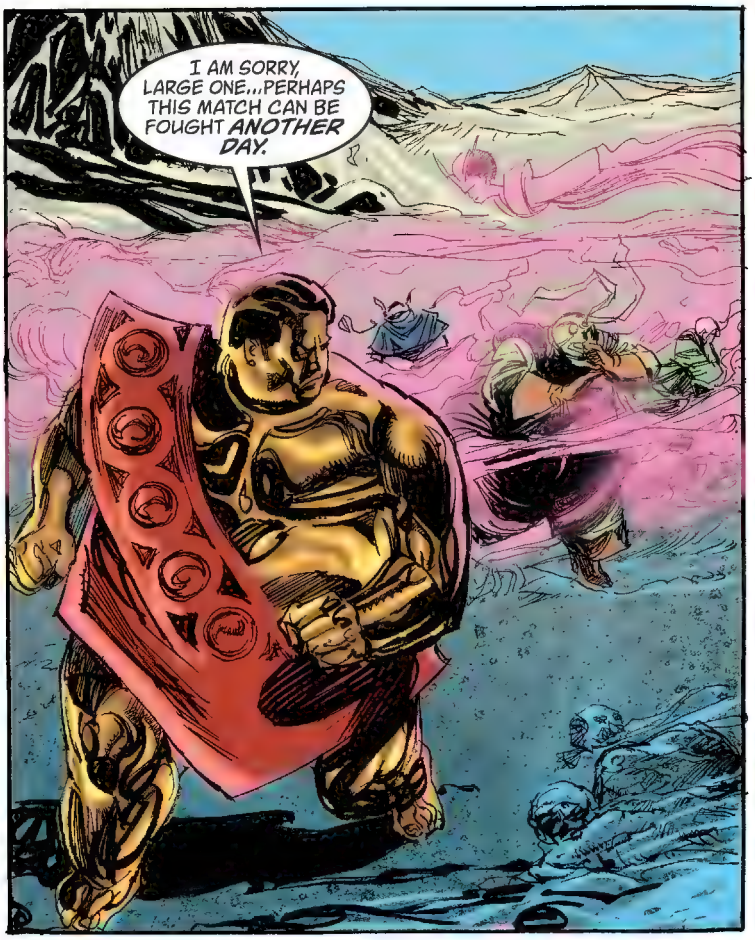

WHAT IT IS LIKE TO HAVE A FATHER WHO IS A VILLAIN.

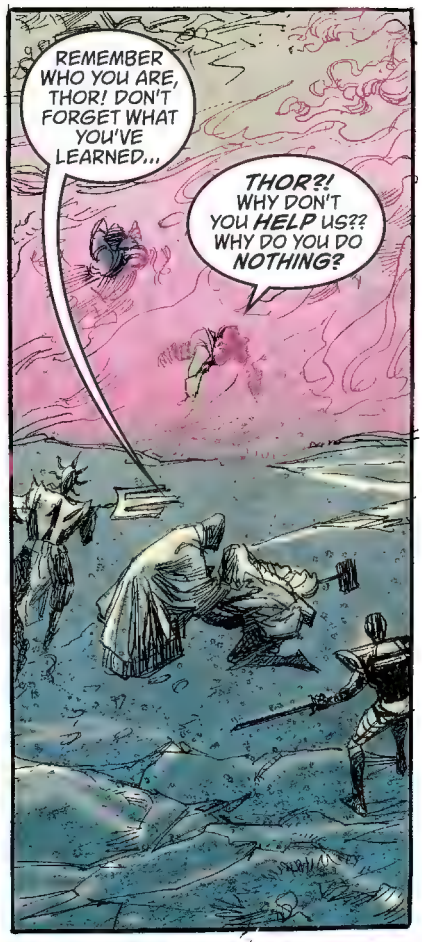

I AM THE LAST SON OF THE MANCHU DYNASTY. I AM A CHI.
I HAVE BETRAYED THE LEGACY PASSED FROM MY FATHER AND HIS FATHER TO ME.
I HAVE WRESTLED WITH DOING WHAT IS RIGHT, THOUGH IT DISHONORS THE BLOOD OF MY FATHER.

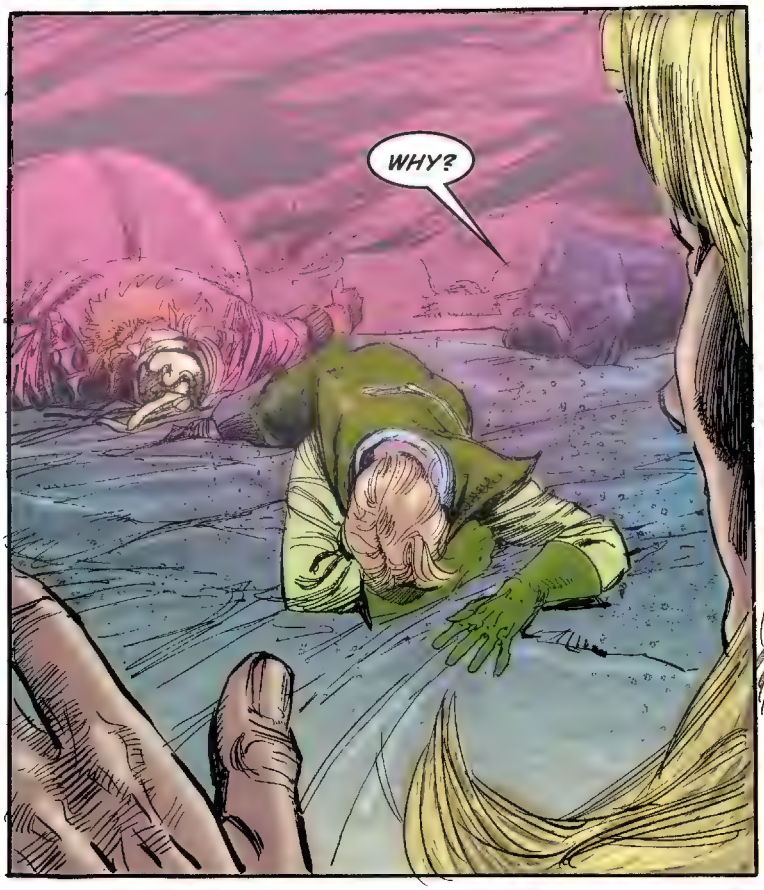

I HAVE WRESTLED WITH THIS. AND HAVE CHOSEN A FACE THAT IS NOT MY FATHER'S.
AND SO, IN BETRAYING THE BLOOD AND HIDING THE FLESH, I HAVE BECOME NEW...AND I AM AT LAST FREE.

I DID NOT... CHOOSE THE HAMMER. I DID NOT CHOOSE A WEAPON OF DES-TRUCTION.


YES, BUT A HAMMER CAN ALSO BE A TOOL.
IT CAN FORGE.
IT CAN FORM.
IT CAN BUILD.

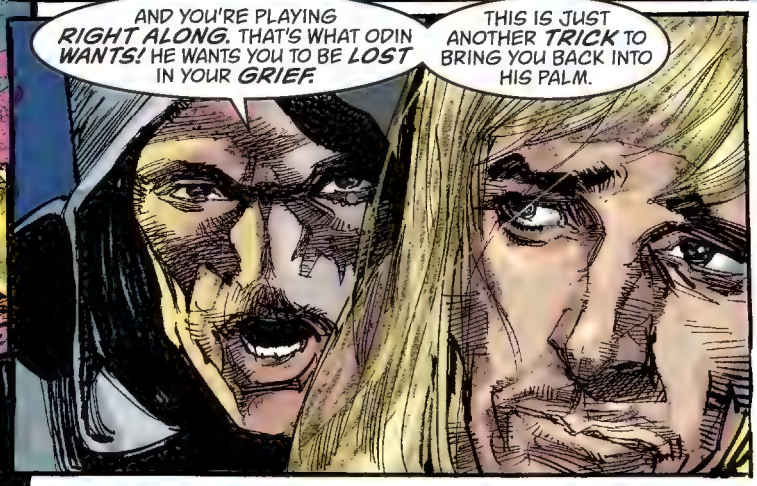

I AM SORRY, LARGE ONE...PERHAPS THIS MATCH CAN BE FOUGHT ANOTHER DAY.


REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE, THOR! DON'T FORGET WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED...
THOR?! WHY DON'T YOU HELP US?? WHY DO YOU DO NOTHING?

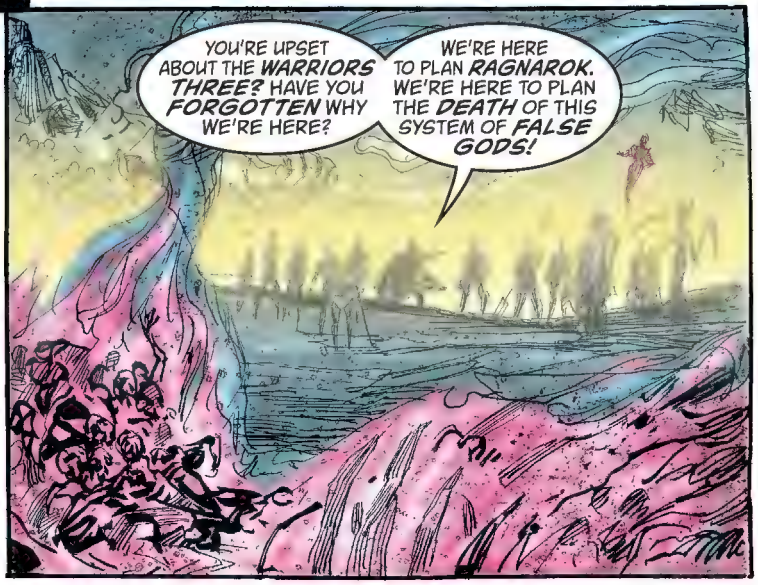

WHY?

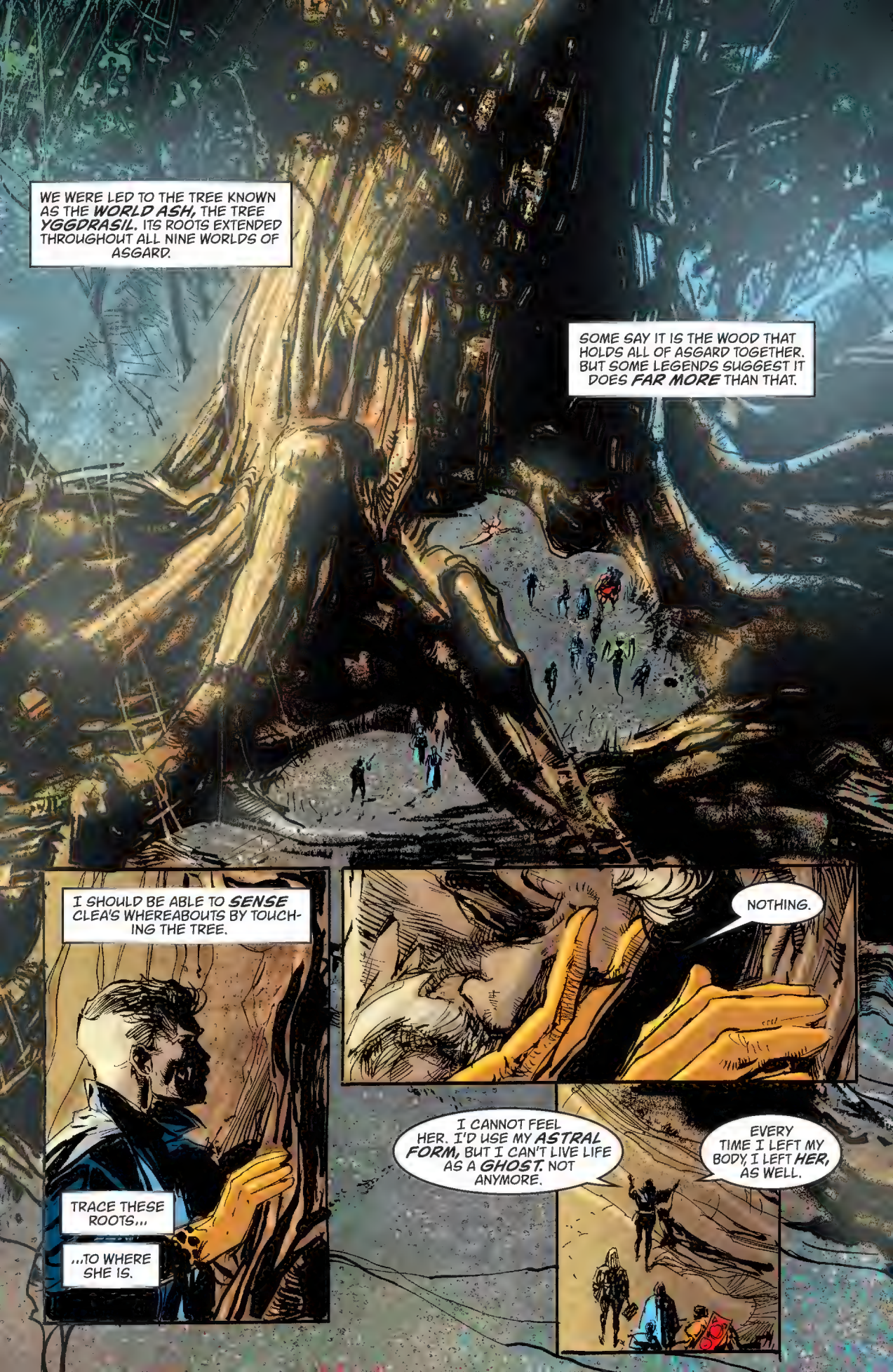
VOLSTAGG, FANDRAL, HOGUN...MY FRIENDS.
MAY HELA GRANT THEE THE FEAST THOU HAST FOUGHT SO HARD TO...

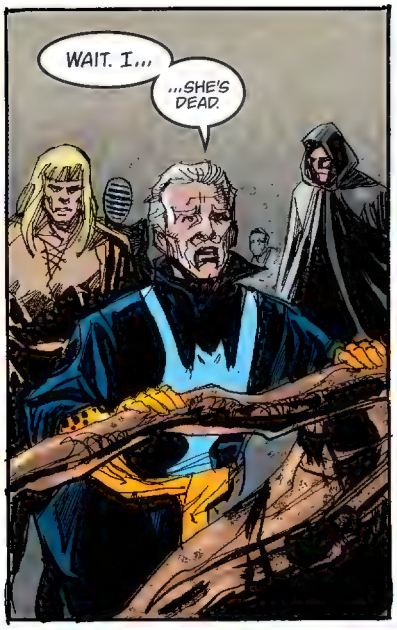
THOR, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
STOP TALKING LIKE THAT. ODIN JUST MOVED THEM TO HELA'S DOMAIN! NONE OF US REALLY DIE. WE JUST MOVE LIKE PLAYING PIECES ON ODIN'S GAME BOARD!


AND YOU'RE PLAYING RIGHT ALONG. THAT'S WHAT ODIN WANTS! HE WANTS YOU TO BE LOST IN YOUR GRIEF.
THIS IS JUST ANOTHER TRICK TO BRING YOU BACK INTO HIS PALM.

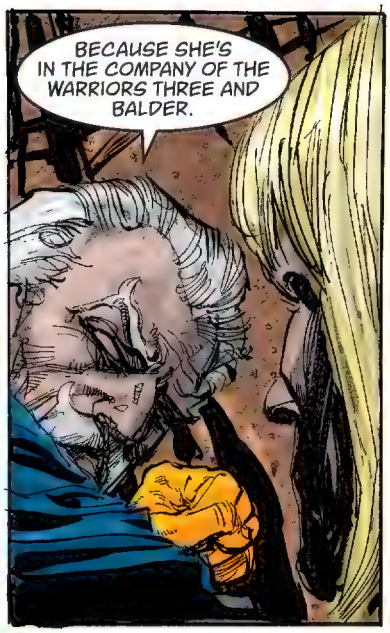
CLEA. WE'RE HERE FOR CLEA.

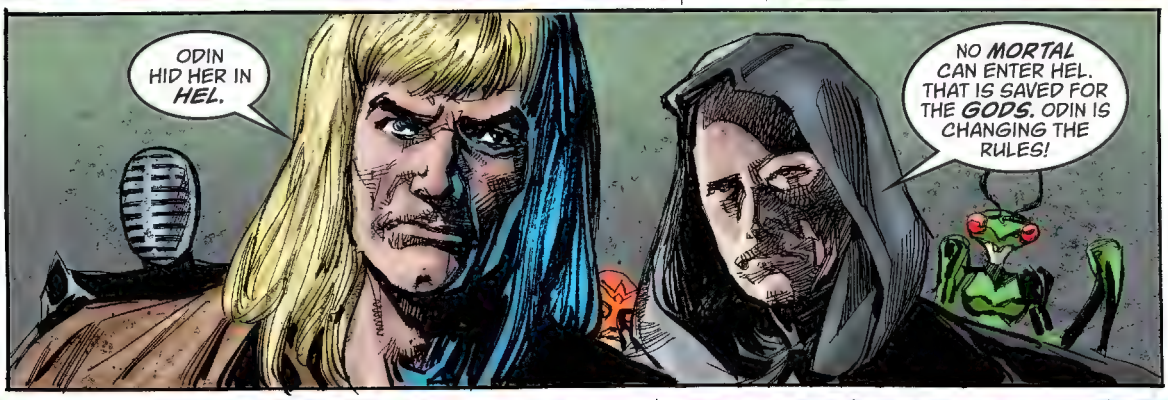

YOU'RE UPSET ABOUT THE WARRIORS THREE? HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHY WE'RE HERE?
WE'RE HERE TO PLAN RAGNAROK. WE'RE HERE TO PLAN THE DEATH OF THIS SYSTEM OF FALSE GODS!


WE WERE LED TO THE TREE KNOWN AS THE WORLD ASH, THE TREE YGGDRASIL. ITS ROOTS EXTENDED THROUGHOUT ALL NINE WORLDS OF ASGARD.
SOME SAY IT IS THE WOOD THAT HOLDS ALL OF ASGARD TOGETHER. BUT SOME LEGENDS SUGGEST IT DOES FAR MORE THAN THAT.
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO SENSE CLEA'S WHEREABOUTS BY TOUCHING THE TREE.
TRACE THESE ROOTS...
...TO WHERE SHE IS.
NOTHING.
I CANNOT FEEL HER. I'D USE MY ASTRAL FORM, BUT I CAN'T LIVE LIFE AS A GHOST. NOT ANYMORE.
EVERY TIME I LEFT MY BODY, I LEFT HER, AS WELL.

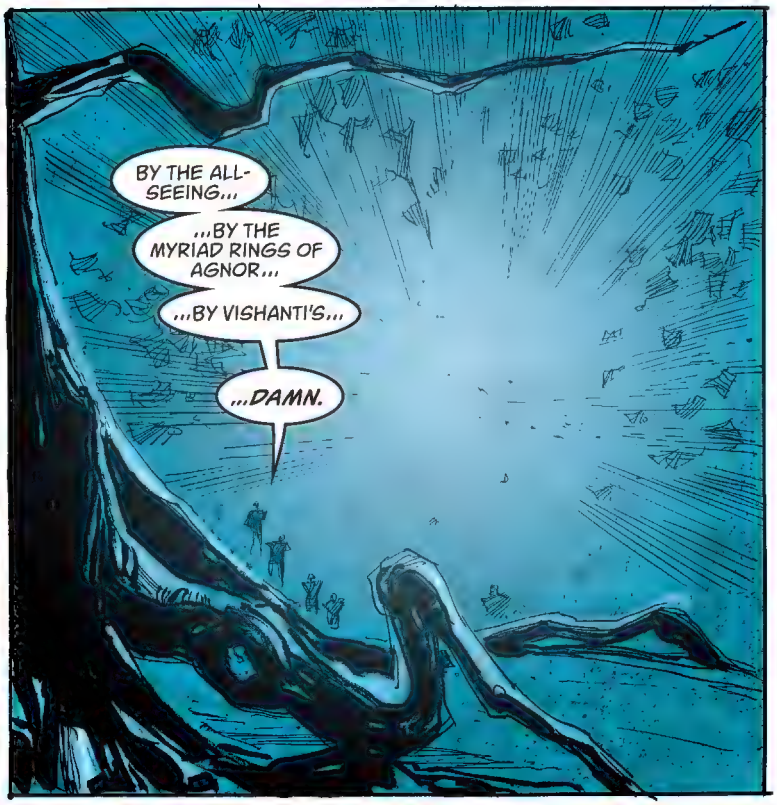

WAIT. I...
...SHE'S DEAD.

I'M TOO LATE.
BUT... MORTALS CANNOT DIE HERE. HOW DO YOU KNOW?


BECAUSE SHE'S IN THE COMPANY OF THE WARRIORS THREE AND BALDER.


ODIN HID HER IN HEL.
NO MORTAL CAN ENTER HEL. THAT IS SAVED FOR THE GODS. ODIN IS CHANGING THE RULES!

SHE'S NOT DEAD.


BY THE ALL-SEEING...
...BY THE MYRIAD RINGS OF AGNOR...
...BY VISHANTI'S...
...DAMN.

THIS IS MY REALM, MORTALS! WHY HAVE THEE RISKED MY WRATH?
ALLOW ME. I'M MORE OF THE DIPLOMATIC TYPE. REMEMBER THE PLAN.
STUFF IT, POPS! WE'RE HERE FOR THE MAGICIAN'S WIFE!
WHO ARE YOU TO SPEAK TO ME THIS WAY?
WHO ARE YOU TO PRETEND TO BE ODIN? THERE IS NO ODIN.
YOU RISK THE LIVES OF SO MANY, LOKI. I CAN BELIEVE THIS FROM YOU, BUT NOT FROM THY BROTHER THOR.

GOOD MORROW, FATHER.

DON'T CALL HIM THAT. ARE YOU FORGETTING EVERY-THING?
BUT LOOK AT HIM, LOKI. IT'S FATHER.

NO, IT ISN'T... HE'S ONLY FOOLED YOU INTO BELIEVING IT.

ALL WE WANT IS CLEA! YOU'VE HAD TO STRETCH YOUR OWN RULES TO KEEP HER HERE, ANYHOW!
IF I CAN CONVINCE THOR THAT ASGARD IS A SHAM, I CAN CONVINCE THE OTHER ASGARDIANS. GIVE US CLEA OR THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD!

VERY WELL...
CLEA!

I'VE MISSED YOU SO MUCH, MY DARLING. I'M SO SORRY FOR EVERYTHING.
THE CHAINS, ODIN. THE CHAINS?

S-STEPHEN? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU... YOU'RE DEAD...I... I BETRAYED YOU.

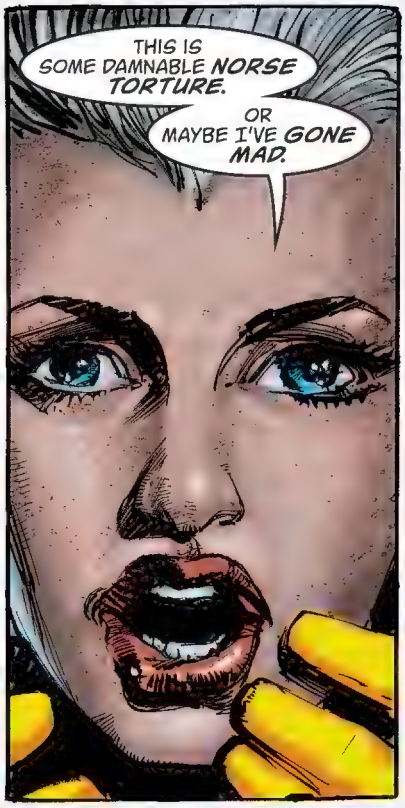
KEEP AWAY FROM ME. IF I CAN SEE YOU, THEN I MUST BE DEAD, TOO.

IT'S OKAY, CLEA. YOU NEVER LOVED ME. YOU WERE BEWITCHED.
WHO ARE YOU?
LOKI.

BUT YOU'RE NOT...YOU... YOU...
NONE OF IT MATTERS, CLEA. IT WAS ALL AN ILLUSION.
YOU ARE MY WIFE.

WIFE?
DID YOU SAY WIFE?

THIS IS AN ILLUSION, ISN'T IT? I'M IMAGINING THINGS.
I WAS NEVER A WIFE TO THE REAL STEPHEN STRANGE.


THIS IS SOME DAMNABLE NORSE TORTURE.
OR MAYBE I'VE GONE MAD.

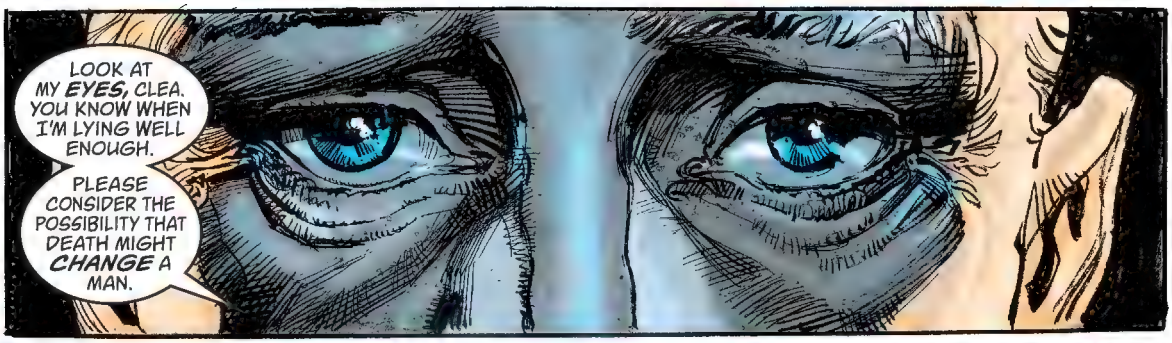
OKAY... I'LL PLAY YOUR GAME.
TELL ME THEN, STRANGE, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'M YOUR WIFE?
WHY DON'T YOU CALL ME WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF ME BEFORE.

ASSISTANT.
ASSOCIATE.
STUDENT.
PET PROJECT.
DISCIPLE.

THE REAL STEPHEN WOULD HAVE NEVER CALLED ME WIFE.

THE REAL STEPHEN ISN'T EVEN WORTHY OF THE NAME HUSBAND.
I DID EVERYTHING YOU'VE ACCUSED ME OF AND MUCH MORE.

BUT WHEN A MAN AND WOMAN GO THROUGH AS MUCH AS WE HAVE AND SURVIVE...IT'S CONSIDERED A MARRIAGE.
THE ONLY REASON MEPHISTO COULD STRIKE AT YOU THROUGH WONG AND LOKI WAS BECAUSE OF MY NEGLECT.


LOOK AT MY EYES, CLEA. YOU KNOW WHEN I'M LYING WELL ENOUGH.
PLEASE CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT DEATH MIGHT CHANGE A MAN.

I NEED YOU. AND WILL NEVER LEAVE AGAIN, NOT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST ASTRAL PROJECTION. I PROMISE.

NO.

IF YOU TAKE THE SOW, STRANGE, I WILL REQUIRE ONE OF YOU TO TAKE HER PLACE.
NO ONE CAN LEAVE HEL WITHOUT ANOTHER TAKING HIS OR HER PLACE. THAT IS THE LAW.
I AM WILLING TO TAKE HER PLACE, ODIN.

NO, LOKI. YOU CAN'T.

PART OF THIS IS MY FAULT, MAGICIAN. IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO.

VERY WELL, YOU STUPID OLD APE! I'M READY!

STOP GOADING ME, LOKI. DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A FOOL?!
I WOULD SOONER LEAVE ASGARD THAN ALLOW LOKI'S MISCHIEF TO POISON THE NETHER-REALMS.
I WANT MY SON--MY TRUE SON THOR TO TAKE THE WENCH'S PLACE.
NO...NOT THOR. ME! TAKE ME! THOR'S NOT--

THE PLAN? DID YOU REALLY BELIEVE I WAS NOT AWARE? I, THE ALL-SEEING ODIN?
caw

NO.
I'M SORRY, BROTHER...BUT WE ALL HAVE TO LOSE SOMETIMES...

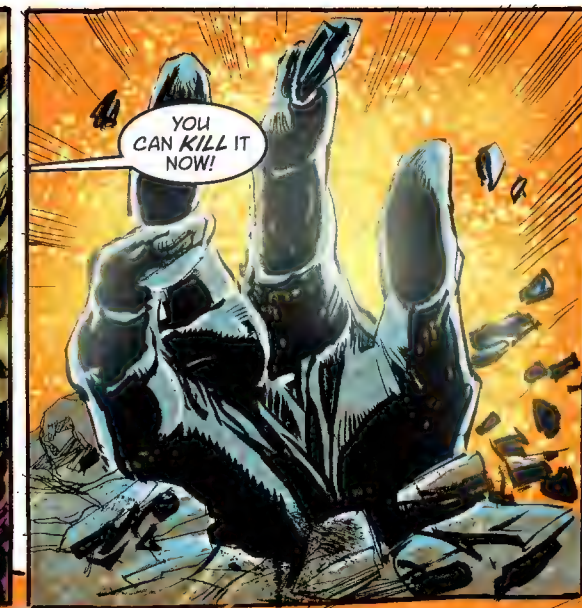
NOOOOOO...

...OOOOOOOO!
WE... WE'RE BACK ON EARTH.
WHAT'S LEFT OF IT.

HAVING LIVED SO LONG AS AN ASTRAL PROJECTION, I COULD SEE THINGS BOTH ***VISIBLE*** AND ***INVISIBLE.***

I KNEW WHO OUR ENEMY WAS. AND I KNEW HOW TO ***DEFEAT*** IT. THE SAME WAY I WAS SAVED.

YOUR NATION WILL GATHER TO THANK YOU FOR THIS, LORD SUNFIRE.



FIN FANG FOOM LIVES AGAIN!

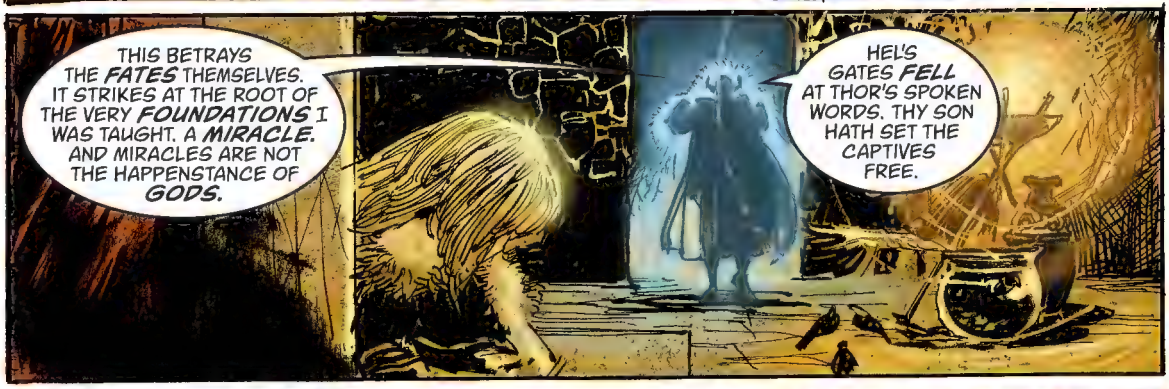
THE BEAST'S BODY WAS OLD AND WEAK.
ITS BONES WERE ROTTING AND DECAYED.
ITS FLESH, WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT, WAS NO MATCH FOR ANY ONE MEMBER OF XEN, LET ALONE ALL OF THEM.
IT DIDN'T LAST LONG.

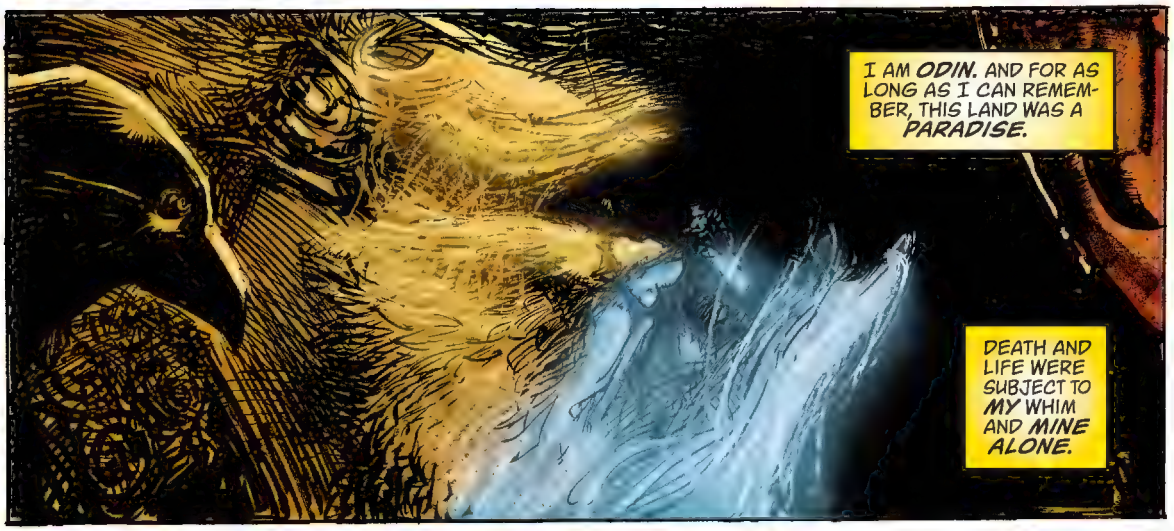
IN THE END, IT WASN'T MUCH OF A VICTORY, AT ALL.

THIS WAS YOUR FAULT, SUNFIRE.
THAT'S LORD SUNFIRE.
NOT TO ME. NOT ANYMORE.
LEADING IS ALMOST AS DIFFICULT AS BEING A SON. I MYSELF NEVER LED.
UNTIL A SON MAKES HIS OWN WAY IN THE WORLD, WE ARE ALL JUST GHOSTS OF OUR FATHERS.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, CLEA.
I DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU, STEPHEN.
FOR A SELF-PROCLAIMED MASTER AND TEACHER, YOU CAN BE A REAL IDIOT.
JUST LIKE YOU SAID, LOKI. ODIN DID EXACTLY WHAT YOU SUSPECTED.
HE COULDN'T CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT I WAS CAPABLE OF A LITTLE MISCHIEF MYSELF.
WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?
BALDER WASN'T WILLING TO BELIEVE ANYTHING COULD CHANGE IN ASGARD...LET ALONE HEL.
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HOW HAPPY HELA WAS.

BALDER.
MY LORD ODIN. I NEVER HOPED TO LOOK UPON THY VISAGE AGAIN.

YOUR SON ENTERED HEL AND SET US FREE.
THE WARRORS THREE, SIF, THE EXECUTIONER, LORELEI, HEIMDALL, TYR, VOLLA, HODER... ALL FREE FROM HELA'S EMBRACE. EVEN HELA HERSELF.


THIS BETRAYS THE FATES THEMSELVES. IT STRIKES AT THE ROOT OF THE VERY FOUNDATIONS I WAS TAUGHT. A MIRACLE. AND MIRACLES ARE NOT THE HAPPENSTANCE OF GODS.
HEL'S GATES FELL AT THOR'S SPOKEN WORDS. THY SON HATH SET THE CAPTIVES FREE.


I AM ODIN. AND FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, THIS LAND WAS A PARADISE.
DEATH AND LIFE WERE SUBJECT TO MY WHIM AND MINE ALONE.

BUT A SERPENT HAS ENTERED MY PARADISE, MY GOLDEN REALM...ONE THAT WAS FORE-TOLD *LONG AGO.*

CHAPTER THREE

"Kyle?"

"Yes, Aaron?"

"You're in touch with a force, the cosmic consciousness. What's it like to know everything at once? If I've learned anything as this Watchman of Earth, it's that I don't want to be like the Watcher before me. I don't want to assume that I know everything, especially when someone like you already does."

"It's not like a book with every page opened at the same time, Aaron. It's more like knowing what page to read when I need a specific piece of knowledge."

"So you access *what*ever you want to know *when* you need to know it?"

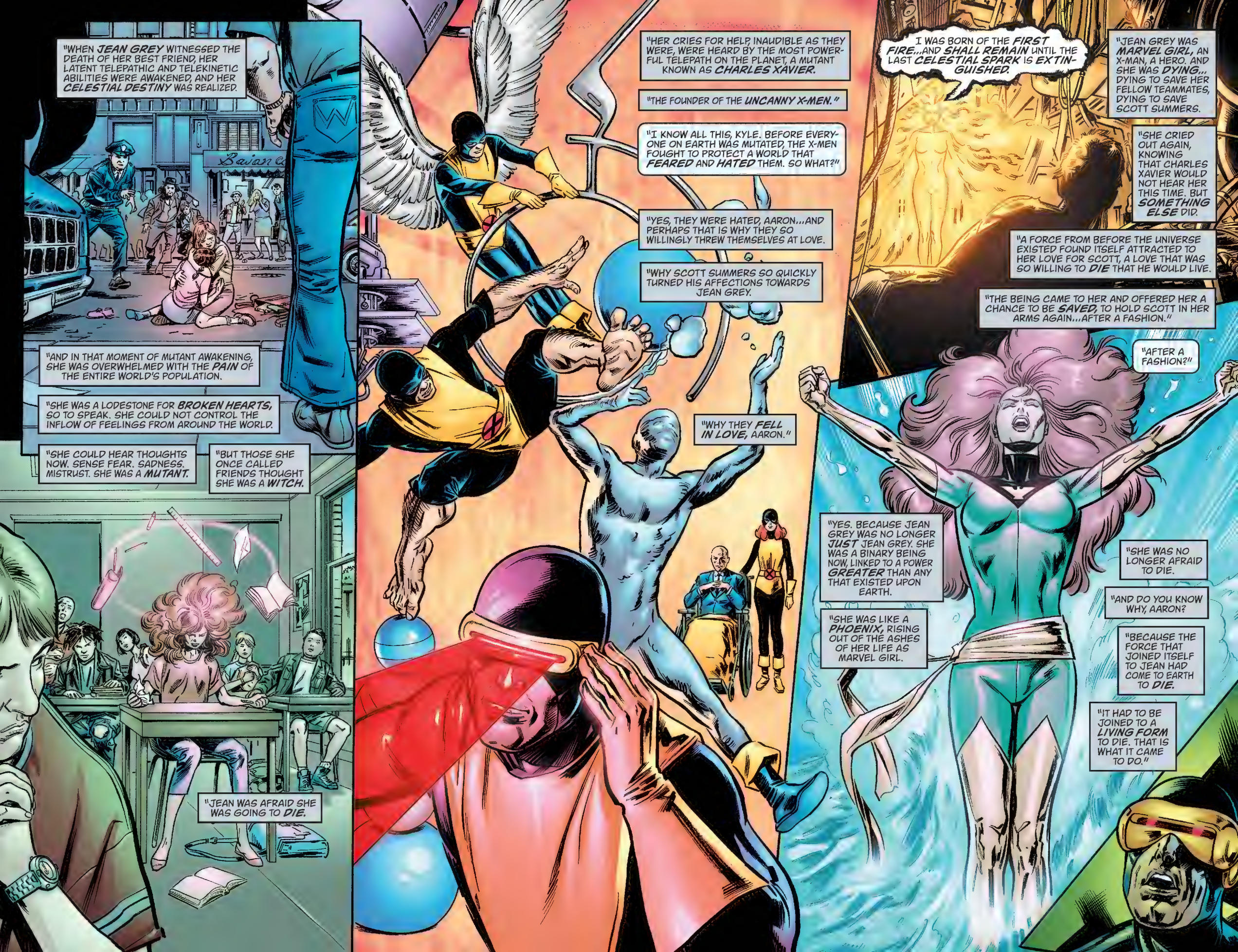
"Exactly. If I want to see the wedding of Medusa and King Britain here on Earth, I can. If I want to know of the coming attack on Frank Castle's family in the Realm of the Dead, I merely turn my thoughts there. If I want to know of the new Paradise, and of Mar-Vell's guardians, it is available with the desire to witness it. But I cannot read more than one page at a time, Aaron. I am still limited and in some ways, even more limited than others."

"What others? Who?"

"Mr. S, for example. Scott Summers, leader of the X-Men."

"I know who Scott is, Kyle, but Cyclops has little in the way of knowledge. How is your experience of the expanding metaphysical universe less than his?"

"Because he still shares a psychic rapport with Phoenix, a being older than the universe itself. A being with an agenda that predates Mar-Vell and the Paradise in the heart of the Negative Zone."


"WHEN JEAN GREY WITNESSED THE DEATH OF HER BEST FRIEND, HER LATENT TELEPATHIC AND TELEKINETIC ABILITIES WERE AWAKENED, AND HER CELESTIAL DESTINY WAS REALIZED.
"AND IN THAT MOMENT OF MUTANT AWAKENING, SHE WAS OVERWHELMED WITH THE PAIN OF THE ENTIRE WORLD'S POPULATION.
"SHE WAS A LODESTONE FOR BROKEN HEARTS, SO TO SPEAK. SHE COULD NOT CONTROL THE INFLOW OF FEELINGS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.
"SHE COULD HEAR THOUGHTS NOW. SENSE FEAR. SADNESS. MISTRUST. SHE WAS A MUTANT.
"BUT THOSE SHE ONCE CALLED FRIENDS THOUGHT SHE WAS A WITCH.
"JEAN WAS AFRAID SHE WAS GOING TO DIE.
"HER CRIES FOR HELP, INAUDIBLE AS THEY WERE, WERE HEARD BY THE MOST POWERFUL TELEPATH ON THE PLANET, A MUTANT KNOWN AS CHARLES XAVIER.
"THE FOUNDER OF THE UNCANNY X-MEN."
"I KNOW ALL THIS, KYLE. BEFORE EVERYONE ON EARTH WAS MUTATED, THE X-MEN FOUGHT TO PROTECT A WORLD THAT FEARED AND HATED THEM. SO WHAT?"
"YES, THEY WERE HATED, AARON...AND PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THEY SO WILLINGLY THREW THEMSELVES AT LOVE.
"WHY SCOTT SUMMERS SO QUICKLY TURNED HIS AFFECTIONS TOWARDS JEAN GREY.
"WHY THEY FELL IN LOVE, AARON."
I WAS BORN OF THE FIRST FIRE...AND SHALL REMAIN UNTIL THE LAST CELESTIAL SPARK IS EXTINGUISHED.
"JEAN GREY WAS MARVEL GIRL, AN X-MAN, A HERO. AND SHE WAS DYING... DYING TO SAVE HER FELLOW TEAMMATES, DYING TO SAVE SCOTT SUMMERS.
"SHE CRIED OUT AGAIN, KNOWING THAT CHARLES XAVIER WOULD NOT HEAR HER THIS TIME. BUT SOMETHING ELSE DID.
"A FORCE FROM BEFORE THE UNIVERSE EXISTED FOUND ITSELF ATTRACTED TO HER LOVE FOR SCOTT, A LOVE THAT WAS SO WILLING TO DIE THAT HE WOULD LIVE.
"THE BEING CAME TO HER AND OFFERED HER A CHANCE TO BE SAVED, TO HOLD SCOTT IN HER ARMS AGAIN...AFTER A FASHION."
"AFTER A FASHION?"
"YES. BECAUSE JEAN GREY WAS NO LONGER JUST JEAN GREY. SHE WAS A BINARY BEING NOW, LINKED TO A POWER GREATER THAN ANY THAT EXISTED UPON EARTH.
"SHE WAS LIKE A PHOENIX, RISING OUT OF THE ASHES OF HER LIFE AS MARVEL GIRL.
"SHE WAS NO LONGER AFRAID TO DIE.
"AND DO YOU KNOW WHY, AARON?
"BECAUSE THE FORCE THAT JOINED ITSELF TO JEAN HAD COME TO EARTH TO DIE.
"IT HAD TO BE JOINED TO A LIVING FORM TO DIE. THAT IS WHAT IT CAME TO DO."

"IT HAD ATTEMPTED TO MERELY ***REANIMATE*** THE BURNT REMAINS OF JEAN GREY, BUT THAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN TOO LONG...THE HEALING OF HER BODY WOULD HAVE LEFT TOO MUCH TIME FOR SCOTT SUMMERS TO FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

"THE PHOENIX NEEDED SCOTT AND SO IT CREATED A ***PSYCHIC RAPPORT*** FOR THEM TO SHARE.

"HE WAS CLOSER TO HER THAN ANY HUMAN COULD BE WITH ANOTHER. THEY SHARED THEIR ***MINDS*** AND ***SOULS.***

"IN JEAN GREY, SCOTT EXPERIENCED HUMAN AND MORTAL LOVE. IN THE PHOENIX FORCE, HE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING ***ETERNAL*** AND ***UN-TARNISHED.***

"THE REMAINS OF HER ORIGINAL BODY WERE LOST BENEATH THE SEA THAT HAD BEEN THE BIRTH-PLACE OF THIS NEW BINARY BEING.

"THAT BODY WOULD BE REVIVED IN TIME, AND SCOTT, AFTER THE DEATH OF PHOENIX, ATTEMPTED TO LOVE HER AGAIN. BUT THIS LOVE WAS SO MUCH ***LESS*** THAN WHAT THEY HAD ONCE SHARED, AND SO IT DID NOT LAST.

"BUT THE BEING THAT JOINED JEAN GREY COULD NOT TAKE ITS OWN LIFE, FOR IT WAS THE ***DEFINITION*** OF CREATION. IT SIMPLY ***COULD NOT.***

"YET IT ***HAD*** TO DIE, AND SO IT LINKED ITSELF TO A BEING THAT WOULD BE WILLING TO LET ITSELF DIE FOR ANOTHER. IT LINKED ITSELF TO A BEING THAT WOULD DIE OUT OF ***LOVE*** AND ***GUILT.***

"THE FORCE THAT JOINED ITSELF TO JEAN GREY WAS A FORCE FROM THE ***FIRST UNIVERSE,*** AARON.

"PART OF A REMNANT GROUP CALLED THE ***ELDERS OF THE UNIVERSE.***

"THEY ARE A RACE OF GARDENERS AND COLLECTORS AND IN-BETWEENERS..."

"IN-BETWEENERS?"

"...THEY ARE TRYING TO ***UNDO*** THE EFFECT OF THE ORIGINAL SHATTERING OF THE UNIVERSE. THEY ARE TRYING TO ***FIX*** WHAT THE CELESTIALS BROKE.

"THE DEATH OF ***DEATH*** WAS FORESEEN. THAT'S WHY PHOENIX IS THERE IN DEATH'S REALM NOW, TO CONTINUE WITH THE COLLECTION OF SOULS."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"THEY ARE ***REBUILDING*** THE UNIVERSE, AARON, RECONSTRUCTING WHAT WAS ONCE BROKEN.

"COLLECTING THE SOULS OF THE DE-PARTED, PREPARING THEM FOR THE COM-ING ***UNIFICATION.*** THAT'S WHY A REALM OF THE DEAD EVEN EXISTS.

"THEY ARE REASSEMBLING THE FIRST WORLDS FROM THE ***ASHES*** OF THE NEW ONES...

"...LIKE A ***PHOENIX.***"

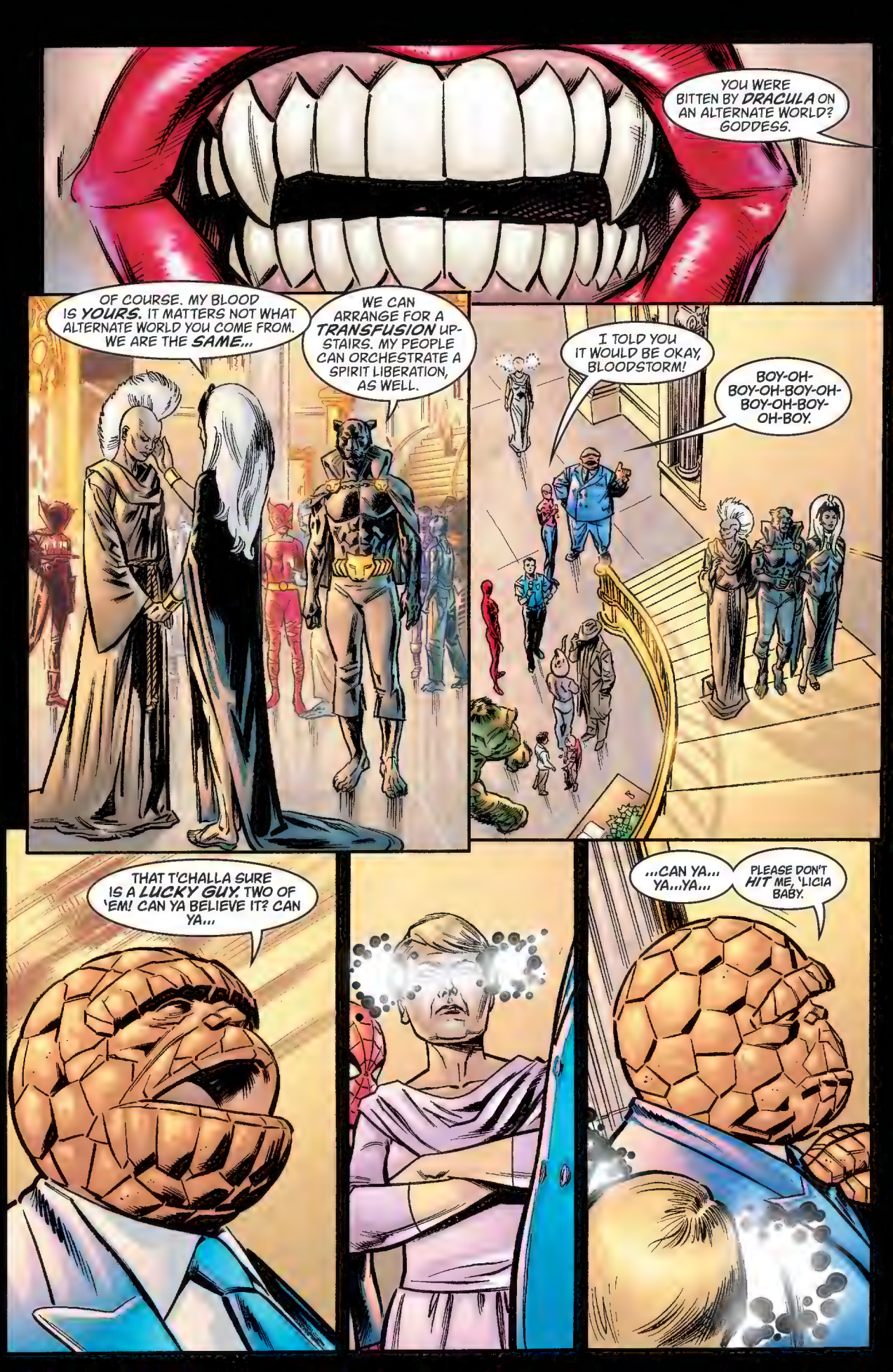
"I KNOW, AARON. IT MAKES WATCHING THE WEDDING OF MEDUSA AND KING BRITAIN A SMALL THING, INDEED."
"OH, I WOULDN'T SAY THAT, KYLE. AFTER ALL, AREN'T THEY DOING THEIR PART FOR REUNIFICATION?
"ISN'T THIS WEDDING AN ATTEMPT TO BRING A DIVERGENT AND WARRING WORLD POPULATION TOGETHER?"
MAY THE EYE OF THE PENDRAGON NEVER TURN FROM YOU...
...MAY ITS FIRE AND BREATH FORGE YOU INTO ONE BEING...
...MAY ALL YOUR SCARS COME FROM ITS TALONS...

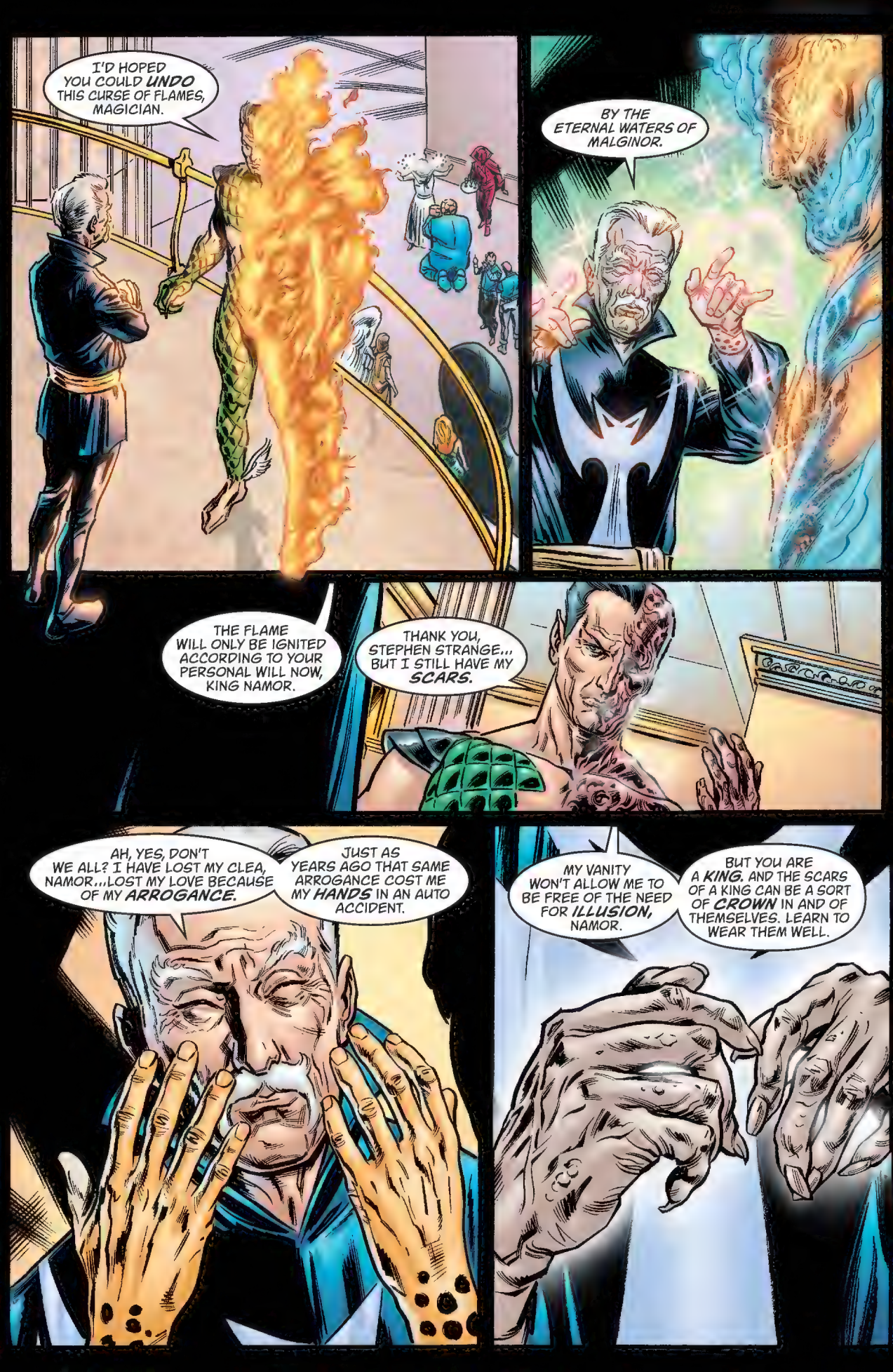
DO YOU SEE HER, LOGAN?
I CAN SMELL 'ER, DARLIN'. SHE'S ACROSS FROM US. LOOKS LIKE SHE AN' THE BLACK PANTHER ARE AN ITEM NOW.
THEY ALSO KNOW WE'RE HERE.
SHE IS VERY BEAUTIFUL, MY KING. IT'S AS IF SHE HAS NOT AGED AT ALL.
YES, MY BRIDE. BUT HER YOUTH CARRIES A COST THAT SETS HER AGAINST THE SPIRITS THEMSELVES.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY X-MEN ARE HERE. SUMMERS... PETEY... CASSIDY... McCOY... BOBBY... JUST 'BOUT EVERYBODY I CAN REMEMBER.
DO YOU REALLY THINK A BLOOD TRANSFUSION FROM MY ALTERNATE WILL CURE ME?
CAN'T HURT, 'RORO. OUR LUCK'S GOT TO CHANGE SOME DAY...
"...NOW WHERE'S LONG-SHOT WHEN YA NEED 'IM?"

"YOU SAID, KYLE, THAT FRANK CASTLE'S FAMILY WAS UNDER ATTACK IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD?"
"YES, FROM CRIMINALS WHO DEFINED HIM IN THE REALM OF THE LIVING.
"CRIMINALS WHO KNOW THE SECRET OF THAT PLACE.
"TO BE HERE IS TO NOT REMEMBER THAT YOU'VE DIED.
"TO EXIST AMONGST THE DEAD IS TO BE CONVINCED THAT YOU STILL LIVE... AND THOSE THAT INDEED DO STILL LIVE, HAVE INSTEAD DIED THEMSELVES..."
ENJOY IT WHILE YOU CAN, CASTLE! YOU'VE ALREADY KILLED US TWICE!
YOUR HEAD ISN'T SCREWED ON QUITE RIGHT, JIGSAW!
I'VE ONLY KILLED YOU... ONCE.

THIS WILL BE... THE SECOND...NO, THE THIRD TIME...I... REMEMBER.
I REMEMBER IT ALL.
NO ONE DIES HERE.
NOT FOR LONG.
THAT'S GOOD.
LET THE PUNISHMENT BEGIN.
OH, GOD... FRANK...
HONEY?

PRESENTING THE ROYAL COUPLE, THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE UNITED KINGDOMS!
HEY, IT'S A PAYCHECK!
HEY, SCOTT! I SAW YOU DIE! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! GOD, THIS IS GREAT!
"GOD, THIS IS GREAT?"
YOU'RE NOT THE LOGAN I KNOW...ARE YOU?
THAT DOESN'T MATTER. YER ALIVE. PETEY'S ALIVE. WARREN'S STILL FLYIN'. EVEN THE ELF'S STILL SCARIN' LITTLE GIRLS!
YA GOTTA UNDERSTAND, I COME FROM A REALITY WHERE ALL THE X-MEN WERE KILLED BY THE SENTINELS!
OH, SEAN, YOU'RE STILL SUCH THE DEVIL!
EVEN MAGNETO'S STILL RUNNIN' AROUND! YOU KNOW, IT TOOK THE COMBINED POWER OF THE SENTINELS TA TURN HIM INTO ONE O' THE GOOD GUYS!
HERE, TOO... OF COURSE, HE WON HERE.
HE DID? THAT'S GREAT. I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! IT'S LIKE DYIN' AN' GOIN' TA HEAVEN.
...GOING TO HEAVEN?
HAVE YOU SEEN MY HUSBAND?


YOU WERE BITTEN BY DRACULA ON AN ALTERNATE WORLD? GODDESS.
OF COURSE. MY BLOOD IS YOURS. IT MATTERS NOT WHAT ALTERNATE WORLD YOU COME FROM. WE ARE THE SAME...
WE CAN ARRANGE FOR A TRANSFUSION UP-STAIRS. MY PEOPLE CAN ORCHESTRATE A SPIRIT LIBERATION, AS WELL.
I TOLD YOU IT WOULD BE OKAY, BLOODSTORM!
BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY-OH-BOY.
THAT T'CHALLA SURE IS A LUCKY GUY. TWO OF 'EM! CAN YA BELIEVE IT? CAN YA...
...CAN YA... YA...YA...
PLEASE DON'T HIT ME, 'LICIA BABY.


I'D HOPED YOU COULD UNDO THIS CURSE OF FLAMES, MAGICIAN.
BY THE ETERNAL WATERS OF MALGINOR.
THE FLAME WILL ONLY BE IGNITED ACCORDING TO YOUR PERSONAL WILL NOW, KING NAMOR.
THANK YOU, STEPHEN STRANGE... BUT I STILL HAVE MY SCARS.
AH, YES, DON'T WE ALL? I HAVE LOST MY CLEA, NAMOR...LOST MY LOVE BECAUSE OF MY ARROGANCE.
JUST AS YEARS AGO THAT SAME ARROGANCE COST ME MY HANDS IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT.
MY VANITY WON'T ALLOW ME TO BE FREE OF THE NEED FOR ILLUSION, NAMOR.
BUT YOU ARE A KING. AND THE SCARS OF A KING CAN BE A SORT OF CROWN IN AND OF THEMSELVES. LEARN TO WEAR THEM WELL.

"AND WHAT OF THE PARADISE, KYLE? WHAT DO YOU SEE?"
"ONLY THAT THE PARADISE COMES AT A PRICE."
IN TIME THERE WILL BE NO MORE ROOM IN THIS ZONE FOR US...
...SO WE WILL HAVE TO MOVE OUR PEOPLE TO RICHARDS' WORLD.
AFTER WE EAT HIS EYES.
RICHARDS SWORE HE WOULD NEVER IMPERIL THE NEGATIVE ZONE AGAIN! THAT'S ANOTHER WORLD THIS ANTI-MATTER CANCER HAS CONSUMED!
HE LIED. THIS IS HIS DOING! IT MUST BE!
YOUR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES ARE OF NO CONCERN TO ME, BLASTAAR.
ONLY RICHARDS' DEATH MATTERS! SOMETHING THAT IN HIS WEAKNESS, RICHARDS WAS MORE THAN WILLING TO PROVIDE ME THE MEANS TO FULFILL.

"AND OVER THIS WAY, WE HAVE THE DOCKING BAY TO THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS DISCOVERED BY REED RICHARDS...
VISIT THE FANTASTIC FOUR MUSEUM TODAY
"...SCHOLARS BELIEVE TODAY THAT THE REASON MUTANT BIGOTRY NEVER BECAME WIDESPREAD WAS DUE TO THE HEROICS OF THE EARLY SUPER-POWERED POPULATION.
"HEROES LIKE CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE AVENGERS AND OF COURSE, THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
"I CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU THE SORT OF SECURITY MEASURES I PUT THEIR MAIL THROUGH ON A DAILY BASIS."
WHAT'S THAT UP THERE?
THAT WOULD BE THE PORTAL TO THE NEGATIVE ZONE. RICHARDS HIMSELF HAD IT SEALED FROM THE INSIDE TO GUARANTEE THAT IT NOT BECOME A DUMPING GROUND FOR NUCLEAR WASTE AND DISARMAMENT CAMPAIGNS.
IT CAN ONLY BE OPENED FROM THE INSIDE...
HEY, IS THIS PART OF THE TOUR?
WHAT? IS THIS EARTH?

NO! IT'S A TRAP!
UH...
THIS PLACE HAS BEEN TURNED ON ITS SIDE...BUT WHAT CAUSED IT?
RICHARDS.
I WENT TO THE BAXTER BUILDING AND ALL I GOT WAS THIS LOUSY T-SHIRT.
WHAT THE HELL?
IT'S INTERESTING, ISN'T IT, PETER? ALL THOSE YEARS, I WAS REALLY BELASCO AND YOU WERE MR. SINISTER?
DA, KURT.
WE BOTH LIVED AS ENEMIES FOR THE SAKE OF FRIENDSHIP.
I, TOO, LOVED JEAN...AND BETRAYED SO MUCH OF THE MAN I WAS RAISED TO BE TO HAVE HER BACK.
THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT HER THEN, EVEN FROM A DISTANCE...SOMETHING THAT SEEMED LIKE SO MUCH MORE THAN FRAIL HUMAN LOVE.
THE WORLD SEEMED SO MUCH BETTER WITH HER IN IT... AND I WAS WILLING TO DO ANYTHING TO HAVE HER BACK.
BUT I SEE NOTHING OF THAT JEAN ANYMORE. AND I WONDER WHAT I WAS THINKING.
TIME TRAVEL AND THE X-MEN. NOTHING GOOD EVER CAME OF IT, EH, BUDDY?
HELLO "MADDIE."
JEAN. I'M NOT A CLONE, LOGAN. YOU KNOW I ONLY SAID THAT TO SNIKT IT TO YOU.
MY SENSES AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TA BE, DARLIN'. YOU DID YER JOB A BIT TOO WELL. I DIDN'T KNOW.
OH.

WAIT, TELL ME YER NOT A PSYCHIC AGAIN AND MESSIN' WITH MY HEAD.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... WHAT FOR?
YA KNOW, A HEALIN' FACTOR'S SUPPOSED TO KEEP SOMETHIN' LIKE THIS FROM HAPPENING.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT IF I WANTED INSULTS, I'D MOVE BACK IN WITH JEANNIE.
"JEANNIE," HUH?
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. NOT HERE. NOT AGAIN!
ALTERNATE WORLD, HUH? FIGGERS.

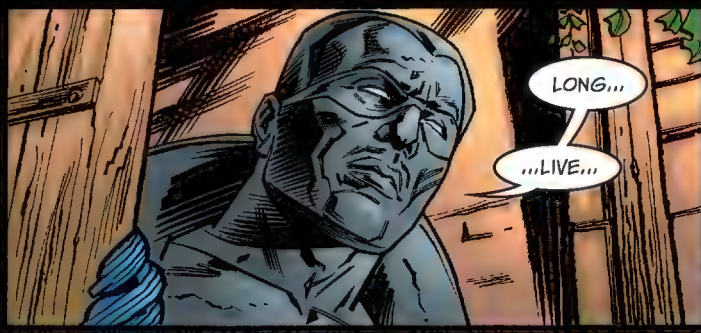
YOU'RE A DEAD MAN!
SCOTT?
WHAT'S GOING ON?
MY SIDE OF THE FAMILY, I'M AFRAID.
AND MR. S TEACHES US NOT TO FIGHT WITH EACH OTHER.
YOU SAID IT-- OW!

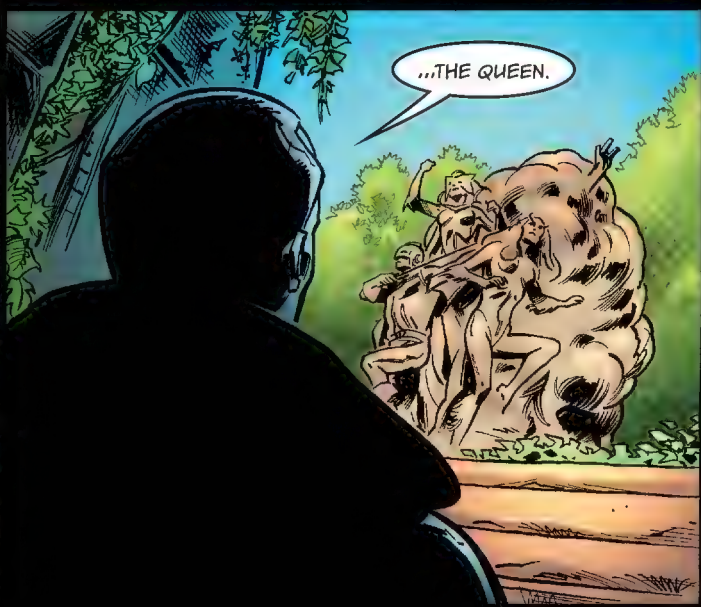
SCOTT, WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
WARREN, YOU IDIOT--LET ME GO! WE HAVE TO GET DOWN THERE AND FIND HIM!

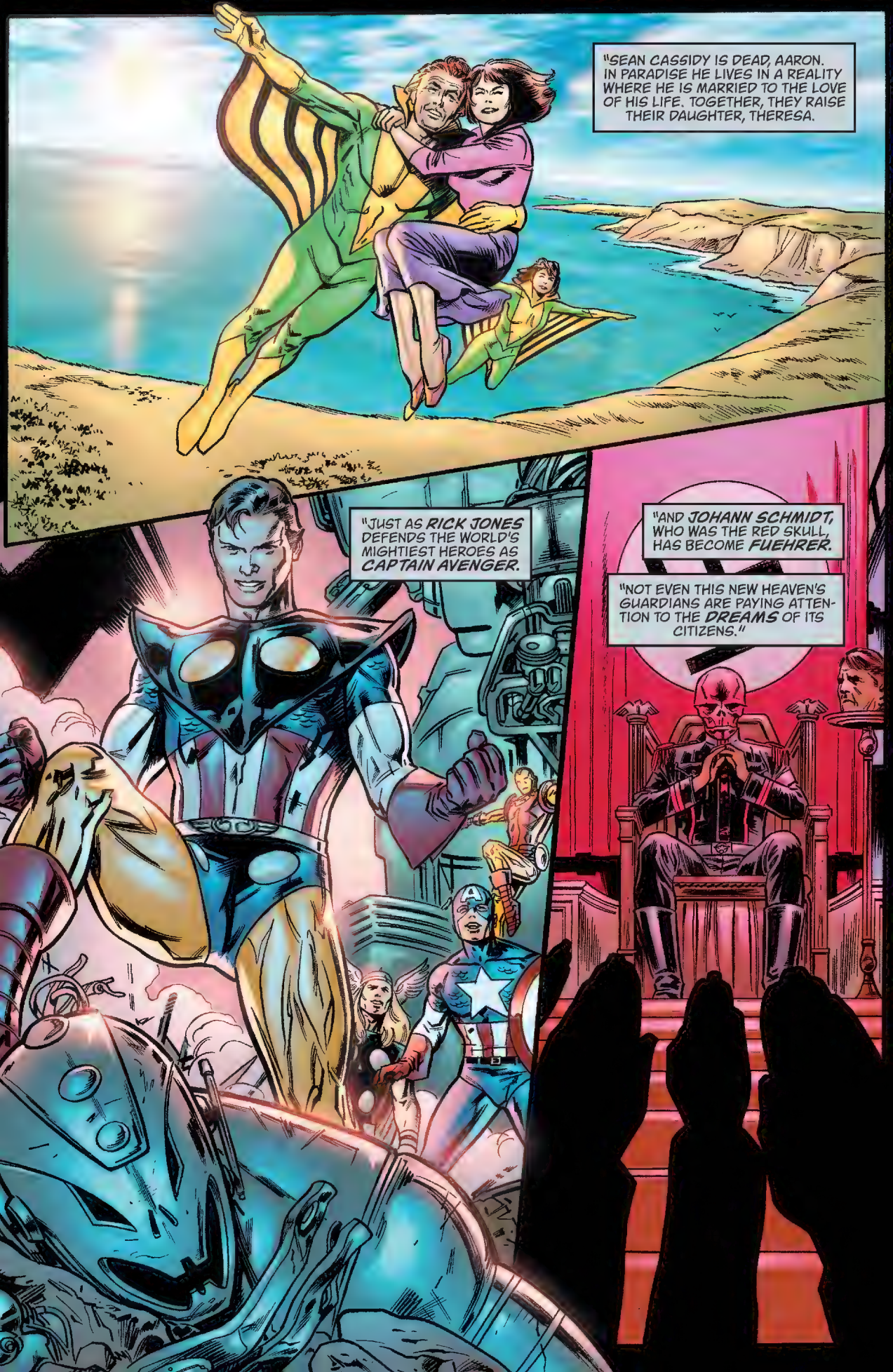
I DON'T KNOW WHO THAT IMPOSTOR WAS...

...BUT SEAN CASSIDY DIED YEARS AGO.

"DON'T ASK ME HOW I KNOW THIS, BUT BANSHEE IS A DEAD MAN."


LONG...
...LIVE...


...THE QUEEN.


"SEAN CASSIDY IS DEAD, AARON. IN PARADISE HE LIVES IN A REALITY WHERE HE IS MARRIED TO THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE. TOGETHER, THEY RAISE THEIR DAUGHTER, THERESA.
"JUST AS RICK JONES DEFENDS THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST HEROES AS CAPTAIN AVENGER.
"AND JOHANN SCHMIDT, WHO WAS THE RED SKULL, HAS BECOME FUEHRER.
"NOT EVEN THIS NEW HEAVEN'S GUARDIANS ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DREAMS OF ITS CITIZENS."

I TOLD SCOTT ABOUT BANSHEE, CAP.
GOOD. WHAT HAPPENED?
WHATEVER IT WAS THAT WAS BANSHEE ESCAPED. I'M LIMITED TO SCOTT'S SIGHT AND VIEW-POINT.
I'M CONCERNED. I'M NOT SEEING MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE ONE-PERSON REALITIES AND WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD.
WITH THE EXCEPTION THAT THERE IS NO INTERACTION WITH OTHER SOULS.
I KNOW SOMETHING OF DEMENTIA AND WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE ALONE.
I, TOO, KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO SPEAK TO NO ONE.
THESE ARE PLEASURE DREAMS. THAT IS ALL.
SURE, BUT THEY'RE FREE TO CHOOSE THE WORLD THEY WANT, INSTEAD OF BEING SHACKLED TO THE ONE THAT WAS.
I DON'T HAVE TO SEE THESE DREAMS TO KNOW THAT THEY ARE BETTER THAN THE WORLD THEY CAME FROM. THEY HAVE TO BE. THEY'RE CHOSEN.
IF ONLY WE COULD BRING EVERYONE IN DEATH'S REALM HERE.

EVERYONE IN DEATH'S REALM WOULD HAVE TO REALIZE THEY'RE DEAD FOR THAT TO OCCUR.
AND SHORT OF A MASS WAVE OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS... I DON'T SEE THAT HAPPENING.
OF COURSE...
...THE SKULL...
...HIS CONTROL OF THE ARMY.
IF HE WERE AWAKENED TO THE REALITY OF DEATH'S REALM...
THIS IS NOT GOOD...I CAN SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING.
CAP'S OKAY. HE IS. HE'S JUST CONCERNED ABOUT HIS PARENTS. HE WANTS THEM HERE. HE WANTS THEM TO BE FREE.
BACK IN WORLD WAR II, STEVE SAVED MY FATHER FROM THE NAZIS. DID I EVER TELL YOU THAT?

"HE NEVER HAD A FAMILY TO FIGHT FOR BEFORE."
THIS IS INSANE, STEVE. IT'S WRONG... BUT...WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
CRASH!
BAM!
SMASH!
OH MY GOD--CAPTAIN AMERICA!
BENNY? TIME FOR DINNER. IT'S GETTING LATE!
DAD, LOOK--IT'S CAPTAIN AMERICA!
CAPTAIN AMERICA? AN HONOR, SIR.
AND FOR ME, AS WELL.
IT'S NICE TO SEE THAT YOU PROVIDE SUCH A GOOD HOME FOR BENNY.
A BOY NEEDS HIS PARENTS.
THAT'S FOR CERTAIN. NOW TELL ME, CAP...HOW DO YOU KNOW MY SON?
"All of us are potential villains. In spite of ethics, morals, codes of conduct and a general respect for laws, if we are pushed far enough, pressured beyond our breaking point, our self-preservation system takes over and we are capable of terrible villainy."
—Ollie Johnston & Frank Thomas

P A R A D I S E X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER THREE

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

JOHN JAMESON/ MAN-WOLF

"What? Who's that?"

"It's me, John. Aaron Stack. X-51, the Watchman from the moon."

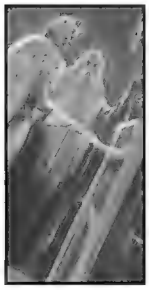
"Ha. Funny you'd show up now. Have you seen what's happened to me and my family? Have you watched us?"

"I have, John Jameson. And that's why I am here."

"Kristine is gone. But you didn't have to see that to know it was coming. All that time we spent on the moon, all those years as Man-Wolf with my family living in fear of me. All those years as outcasts, and you know what? They were the best years of our lives."

"I don't understand."

"When we returned here to Earth after Galactus' confrontation with the Celestials, we found this to be a world more made for me than for Kristine. But that didn't last long at all.



"Kristine, my wife who was there for me for so long, during almost my entire curse, could not deal with the fact that she too was mutating now into something less than human.

"The mutation drove her mad. She ran with the children, leaving me alone with my father, whose own mutation made him an object of ridicule."

"He now has the head of an..."

"An ass. That's right, Aaron. The head of an ass. The first time Peter Parker saw him, Peter laughed for days. My father hated Spider-Man, you remember, and with the discovery that Spider-Man was really Peter Parker, my dad's own photojournalist, it sort of drove the nail in his coffin."

"I have wondered, at times, if perhaps these mutations weren't somehow caused by one's own psychology and view of themselves. I am not the first to suggest this, and I'm certain that if there is even some truth to it, there's probably more to guess than that. But it seems unlikely that J. Jonah Jameson saw himself as an ass."

"Bull-headed. That would have worked for my father, but you're right, Aaron. It doesn't make sense."

"And I've seen too much design in this world to believe it was just bad luck. Have you spoken to Kristine or your children since they left?"

"Once. And it was not a good conversation. She used to bark at me in the English language. Now, well, I hardly understand what she's saying. I don't even know if the children are with her."

"No they're not."

"You've seen them?"

"I have, John. That's why I've come down to Earth to speak with you. They're safe. Your wife, no longer able to even understand what she was doing, left them in

Chicago.

"They're being taken care of by a man named Scott Lang and his daughter Cassie. They had been living in the Iron Manor with Tony Stark, and barely survived Tony's attack on the Celestials. They settled in Chicago, and came upon your children by accident.

"Lang's wife died years ago, John. So he'd be able to help you with your loss. I can take you there, to your children now, if you wish."

"I...I do...are they well?"

"Of course, Scott Lang was an Ant-Man. And so the smallest of crumbs can become meals fit for a king. They're well-fed but miss you."

"I want to go, right now, Aaron. But first, I need to say good-bye to my father. Can you take me there first?"

"Of course."

"Step this way into the monolith. The transportation to the hospital will happen at a moment's notice. I will wait within this transportational doorway until you join me again."

"Oh geez...Father, is that you already?"

"John. I didn't see you walk in."

"I came a different route. Monolith. Pretty soon, everybody will be travelling this way. See, I brought you another scoop."

"Good boy. But I'm no longer in the newspaper business."

"Dad, I have to go. I just found out where the kids are. I have to go to Chicago."

"And Kris?"

"I have no idea, Dad. From what I know, she just went crazy when she mutated."

"That I can understand. These powers are curses. If I didn't know this was too big a mess for even him to do, I'd blame it on Parker."

"Shut up, Dad. You know Peter's a police officer now."

"I don't believe it. But what does that have to do with me?"

"You used to say that Spider-Man wasn't a real hero, that he wasn't like people like me...astronauts...firemen...police officers."

"I should be dead by now, John."

"I know, Dad. But I'm glad you're not."

"That makes one of us, boy. This world isn't for people like me anymore. Life has become unfair, in a way that hurts and pricks and doesn't let up. I was a man of power, once. My opinion could make or break a Senator's campaign. But I've lost all of that.

"This was a world where once it was the idea, the opinion of the individual that was measured as power. When words could change the world, even a single word—that was a world I wanted to live in. Not this mutated cacophony of genetic waste that once claimed to be humanity."

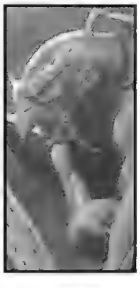
"You're so wrong, Dad. It still is that world. If anything, in the midst of the civil wars and the cataclysm, ideas mean more than anything. Who's the greatest hero alive in the world today?

"It's not Thor, not the Hulk, not the Thing, not any of the people that are the strongest.

"It's Reed Richards. He only has one arm. Can only stretch at great pain. Reed has lost more than either of us has.

"And why is he the greatest hero, Dad? It's because of his ideas, because of his words.

"It was a word that called out to Galactus to save us. It was ideas that led to the repolarization of the planet. It was thought that led to Loki's becoming a hero. And it will be an idea that brings peace to you and everyone else forced to endure such pain in these hospitals.



"It's still that world you once wanted to live in, Dad, and you might still be a part of it for a long time. I have to go. I love you, Dad."

CHAPTER FOUR

"Kyle?"

"Yes, Aaron?"

"What's happening to Uatu? Have you noticed? He moves through this citadel of his as though it were the first time. His being blind should make no difference at all, not for the length of time he's been here. Something is wrong with him."

"Obviously."

"Was it Vance Astro's psychic attack on Uatu when the Guardians of the Galaxy first arrived on the moon?"

"No."

"Then something that the other Watchers did to him when they were here?"

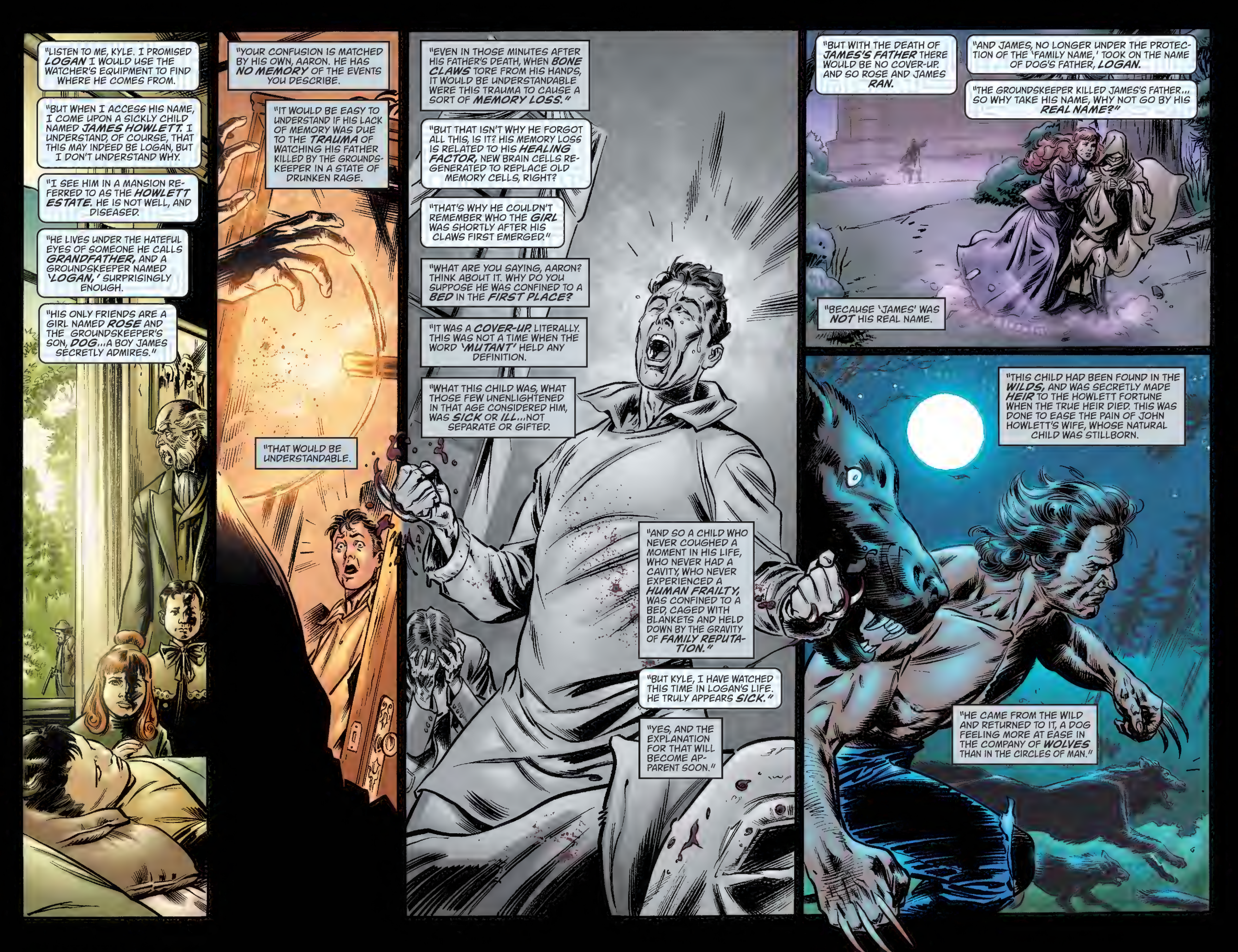
"No."

"Then what? You're supposed to know everything, Kyle. Talking to you is becoming like talking to Uatu."

"You don't know what it's like to know everything, Aaron. You don't know what it's like to recognize the good that comes after an act of evil. You don't know what it's like to wait for something you know will come out of suffering."

"I'm getting tired of waiting for you. What is wrong with Uatu?"

"Shame, Aaron. The Watcher's dying of shame."


"LISTEN TO ME, KYLE. I PROMISED LOGAN I WOULD USE THE WATCHER'S EQUIPMENT TO FIND WHERE HE COMES FROM.
"BUT WHEN I ACCESS HIS NAME, I COME UPON A SICKLY CHILD NAMED JAMES HOWLETT. I UNDERSTAND, OF COURSE, THAT THIS MAY INDEED BE LOGAN, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY.
"I SEE HIM IN A MANSION REFERRED TO AS THE HOWLETT ESTATE. HE IS NOT WELL, AND DISEASED.
"HE LIVES UNDER THE HATEFUL EYES OF SOMEONE HE CALLS GRANDFATHER, AND A GROUNDSKEEPER NAMED 'LOGAN,' SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH.
"HIS ONLY FRIENDS ARE A GIRL NAMED ROSE AND THE GROUNDSKEEPER'S SON, DOG...A BOY JAMES SECRETLY ADMIRES."
"YOUR CONFUSION IS MATCHED BY HIS OWN, AARON. HE HAS NO MEMORY OF THE EVENTS YOU DESCRIBE.
"IT WOULD BE EASY TO UNDERSTAND IF HIS LACK OF MEMORY WAS DUE TO THE TRAUMA OF WATCHING HIS FATHER KILLED BY THE GROUNDSKEEPER IN A STATE OF DRUNKEN RAGE.
"THAT WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE.
"EVEN IN THOSE MINUTES AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH, WHEN BONE CLAWS TORE FROM HIS HANDS, IT WOULD BE UNDERSTANDABLE WERE THIS TRAUMA TO CAUSE A SORT OF MEMORY LOSS."
"BUT THAT ISN'T WHY HE FORGOT ALL THIS, IS IT? HIS MEMORY LOSS IS RELATED TO HIS HEALING FACTOR, NEW BRAIN CELLS REGENERATED TO REPLACE OLD MEMORY CELLS, RIGHT?
"THAT'S WHY HE COULDN'T REMEMBER WHO THE GIRL WAS SHORTLY AFTER HIS CLAWS FIRST EMERGED."
"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, AARON? THINK ABOUT IT. WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE HE WAS CONFINED TO A BED IN THE FIRST PLACE?
"IT WAS A COVER-UP. LITERALLY. THIS WAS NOT A TIME WHEN THE WORD 'MUTANT' HELD ANY DEFINITION.
"WHAT THIS CHILD WAS, WHAT THOSE FEW UNENLIGHTENED IN THAT AGE CONSIDERED HIM, WAS SICK OR ILL...NOT SEPARATE OR GIFTED.
"AND SO A CHILD WHO NEVER COUGHED A MOMENT IN HIS LIFE, WHO NEVER HAD A CAVITY, WHO NEVER EXPERIENCED A HUMAN FRAILTY, WAS CONFINED TO A BED, CAGED WITH BLANKETS AND HELD DOWN BY THE GRAVITY OF FAMILY REPUTATION."
"BUT KYLE, I HAVE WATCHED THIS TIME IN LOGAN'S LIFE. HE TRULY APPEARS SICK."
"YES, AND THE EXPLANATION FOR THAT WILL BECOME APPARENT SOON."
"BUT WITH THE DEATH OF JAMES'S FATHER THERE WOULD BE NO COVER-UP. AND SO ROSE AND JAMES RAN.
"AND JAMES, NO LONGER UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE 'FAMILY NAME,' TOOK ON THE NAME OF DOG'S FATHER, LOGAN.
"THE GROUNDSKEEPER KILLED JAMES'S FATHER... SO WHY TAKE HIS NAME, WHY NOT GO BY HIS REAL NAME?"
"BECAUSE 'JAMES' WAS NOT HIS REAL NAME.
"THIS CHILD HAD BEEN FOUND IN THE WILDS, AND WAS SECRETLY MADE HEIR TO THE HOWLETT FORTUNE WHEN THE TRUE HEIR DIED. THIS WAS DONE TO EASE THE PAIN OF JOHN HOWLETT'S WIFE, WHOSE NATURAL CHILD WAS STILLBORN.
"HE CAME FROM THE WILD AND RETURNED TO IT, A DOG FEELING MORE AT EASE IN THE COMPANY OF WOLVES THAN IN THE CIRCLES OF MAN."

"BUT THE TRAGEDY OF LOSING THE ONLY FRIEND HE EVER HAD SOON BECAME JUST ANOTHER ***FORGOTTEN MEMORY***...AND LOGAN BEGAN TO DRIFT FROM PLACE TO PLACE, JOB TO JOB.

"HE MET ANOTHER MAN, ***SABRETOOTH,*** WHOSE SCENT AND ACTIONS MADE HIM AN INSTANT ENEMY.

"SABRETOOTH WAS LOGAN'S BETTER IN ALMOST EVERY WAY. LOGAN ***BARELY SURVIVED*** THEIR FIRST MEETING.

"LOGAN, WHOSE BRAWLING AND SUBSEQUENT HEALING FACTOR WAS LEGENDARY, WAS TARGETED BY A COVERT GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, AND HIS SKELETON WAS LACED WITH A MALLEABLE BUT INDESTRUCTIBLE METAL KNOWN AS ***ADAMANTIUM.***"

"LOGAN'S HEALING FACTOR WAS NECESSARY TO MAKE THE GRAFT SUCCESSFUL. THE OPERATION WOULD HAVE EASILY ***KILLED*** ANY NORMAL HUMAN BEING."

"***NORMAL*** HUMAN BEING?"

"LISTEN. THOUGH LOGAN THOUGHT HE'D ***ESCAPED*** THE WEAPON X PROGRAM, HE DID NOT. HE ONLY FOUND HIMSELF AFFILIATED WITH A DIFFERENT ***SUBSECTION*** OF IT."

"***ALPHA FLIGHT.***"

"ALPHA FLIGHT WAS LED BY ***JAMES MACDONALD HUDSON,*** WHO HAD FOUND LOGAN WANDERING IN THE CANADIAN WILDS. LOGAN, NOW CODE-NAMED ***WOLVERINE,*** MET OTHER SUPER-POWERED AGENTS OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT WITHIN ALPHA FLIGHT.

"HE MET DR. WALTER LANGKOWSKI...

"...WHOSE OWN MUTATION INTO THE HERO ***SASQUATCH*** CAME AS A RESULT OF EXPERIMENTS IN SELF-RADIATION.

"BUT I THOUGHT SASQUATCH'S MUTATION WAS ***SELF-INDUCED?***"

"IT WAS...BUT WHAT LANGKOWSKI WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE THROUGH ***ARTIFICIAL*** MEANS WAS ALTOGETHER ***NATURAL*** TO LOGAN."

"ANOTHER LIKE LOGAN."

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

"THEN THINK ABOUT WOLVERINE'S FIRST MISSION AGAINST THE ***HULK*** AND ***WENDIGO.***

"THE WENDIGO TRANSFORMATION IS A MUTATION TRIGGERED BY AN ACT OF ***CANNIBALISM.***

"YET ***ANOTHER*** REVERSION."

"REVERSION? DON'T YOU MEAN ***MUTATION?***"

"THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ***MUTANTS,*** AARON. NOTHING TO DO WITH THE ***X-MEN,*** AT ALL.

"DO YOU STILL BELIEVE LOGAN WAS ASKED TO JOIN THE X-MEN BECAUSE HE WAS A ***MUTANT?***"

"BUT PROFESSOR X ASKED LOGAN TO... HE...OH MY GOD, KYLE. LOGAN'S NOT A MUTANT, AT ALL.

"THE ***CELESTIALS.*** THEY DIDN'T... THAT'S WHY HE...OF COURSE.

"AND THAT'S WHY HE BECAME ILL WHEN CONFINED TO A BED...HE...

"...I HAVE TO ***LEAVE,*** KYLE. I HAVE TO TELL LOGAN WHAT I'VE LEARNED.

"I ***PROMISED*** HIM."

"BEFORE YOU GO, AARON, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT REED RICHARDS HAS SOUGHT OUT THE AID OF ***DR. STRANGE*** TO FIND A CURE FOR THE SUFFERING OF THOSE WHO ***SHOULD*** BE DEAD, BUT ARE ***NOT.***

"THE NUMBER OF GATHERING MINDS ***GROWS*** IN LATVERIA. BANNER IS THERE, AS IS McCOY. THEY JOIN RICHARDS, IMMORTUS AND OTHERS."

THIS WASN'T ***NECESSARY,*** STEPHEN. YOU COULD HAVE SENT YOUR ASTRAL SELF.

I DON'T DO THAT ANYMORE, REED.

HELLO, STEPHEN. NICE TO SEE ANOTHER ***DEFENDER*** AROUND HERE.

BRUCE.

IT'S FUNNY, STEPHEN...

...I ALWAYS FELT THE DEFENDERS SHOULD BE A SORT OF ***ACCOUNTABILITY GROUP*** FOR ITS OWN MEMBERSHIP.

THAT WE BELONGED TOGETHER TO PROTECT THE WORLD FROM ***OUR-SELVES.***

BUT I REMEMBER THIS IDEA WAS SHOT DOWN BECAUSE THERE WASN'T A ***TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM*** FOR PEOPLE WHO COULD FLY OR GET FROM HERE TO THERE IN ONE LEAP.

SORRY TO CUT YOUR REUNION SHORT, GENTLEMEN, BUT ***THIS*** IS OUR PROBLEM.

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF HOSPITALS ON THE FACE OF THE PLANET, YET THEY ARE ***FILLED TO CAPACITY.*** FILLED WITH PEOPLE WHO WANT AND ***BEG*** TO DIE.

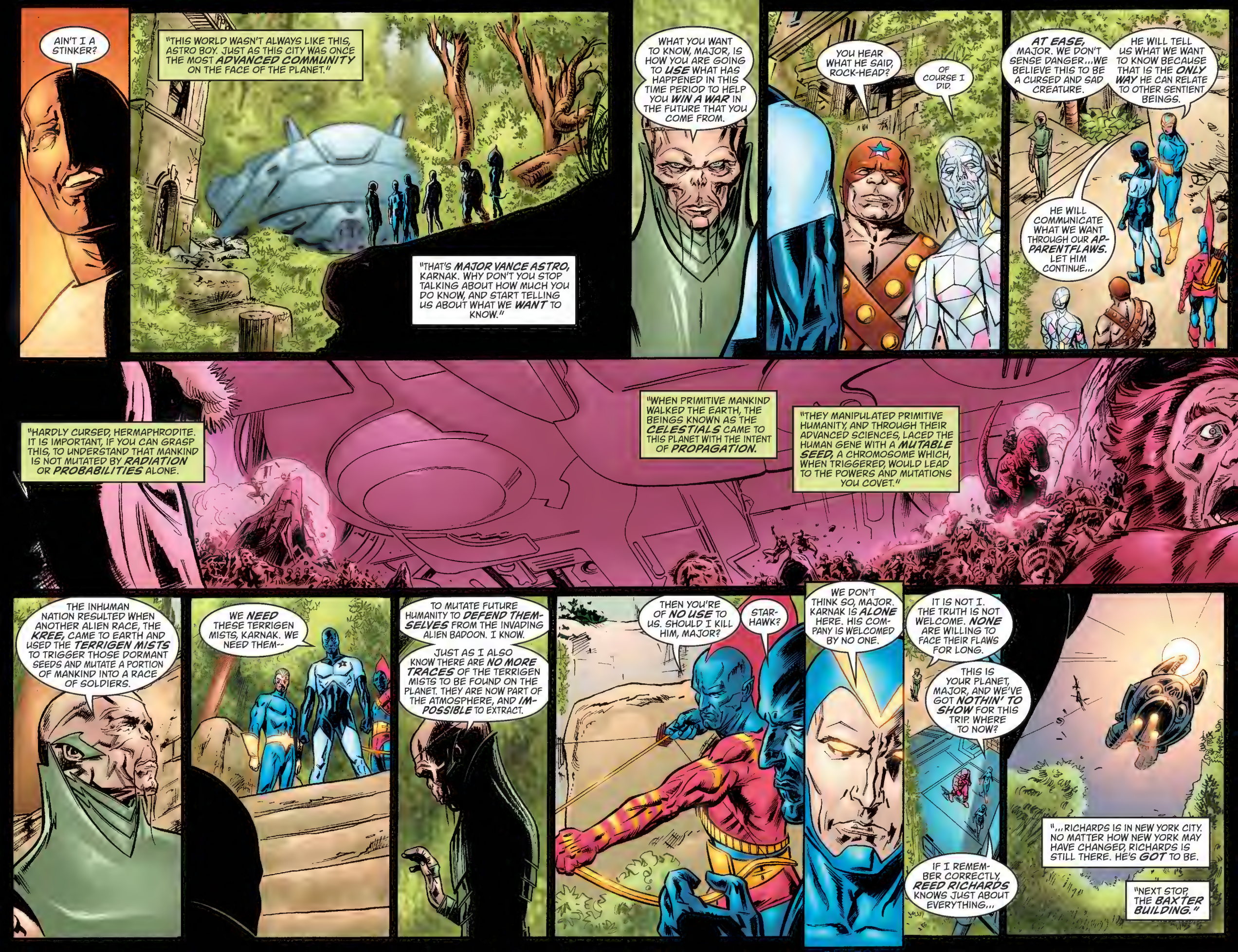
ARE WE IN AGREEMENT THEN, GENTLEMEN...THAT A SURROGATE WILL BE NECESSARY?
A SURROGATE TO DEATH? YOU WANT TO FIND A REPLACEMENT?
YOU'RE RIGHT, BRUCE. THIS WORLD DOES HAVE TO BE DEFENDED FROM US.
NO, STEPHEN. WE ARE ONLY TRYING TO RESTORE A BALANCE, A NATURAL BALANCE TO MANKIND.
SO SAYS THE SLAYER OF THE CELESTIAL EMBRYO.
YOU'RE BEING UNFAIR, MAGICIAN. YOU--
REED? WHAT IS IT?
THE BAXTER BUILDING. OUR OLD HEADQUARTERS... SOMETHING'S WRONG.
THIS WILL HAVE TO WAIT, GENTLEMEN. I'M NEEDED IN NEW YORK.

NO MATTER HOW MUCH I WANT TO BELIEVE THIS IS NEW YORK, I KNOW THAT IT IS NOT. THIS IS A GHOST TOWN.
ITS INHABITANTS, PEOPLE LIKE MY PARENTS, PEOPLE LIKE FRANK CASTLE, ARE NO LONGER ALIVE...NOT IN THE MORTAL SENSE OF THE WORD.
FRANK CASTLE BECAME THE PUNISHER WHEN HIS FAMILY WAS KILLED BY ORGANIZED CRIME. HE SPENT THE REST OF HIS LIFE FIGHTING AGAINST THE MOB.
AND NOW THAT HE IS DEAD, HE HAS HIS FAMILY AGAIN.
AM I REALLY PREPARED TO TAKE THAT ALL AWAY FROM HIM?
AM I READY TO USE POWER IN WAYS I NEVER HAVE BEFORE? AM I READY TO PLAY THE TYRANT FOR THE SAKE OF UNIVERSAL LIBERATION?
I AM, AS EVER, A SLAVE TO FREEDOM.
HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO KILL YOU TO MAKE IT REAL?
LEAVE ME AND MY FAMILY ALONE!
STEVE?
FAMILY IS SACRED, YOU SCUM.
AS IS LIFE...

...HOW DARE YOU PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING YOU ARE NOT!
THAT'S ONE FOR MY JOURNAL.
HONEY? DID YOU...? HONEY?
KEEP AWAY FROM US!
YOU'RE A MONSTER, FRANK!
NO...I WAS PROTECTING MY FAMILY.
THAT'S WHAT GOOD HUSBANDS DO. THEY KEEP BAD THINGS FROM HAPPENING.
I SAVED YOU FROM THE MONSTERS...
GET AWAY FROM US! HANDS THAT CAN DO WHAT I SAW YOU DO WILL NEVER HOLD ME OR MY CHILDREN AGAIN. NEVER!
BUT THEY KEPT COMING BACK... HOW COULD I STOP--?
SHUT UP, FRANK! OH GOD, JUST SHUT UP!
I AM WHAT I AM BECAUSE OF YOU. BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHILDREN. CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?
I DID WHAT I DID BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY DID TO YOU. AND I'LL DO IT AGAIN. AS MANY TIMES AS I HAVE TO.
WHAT DID THEY DO TO US, FRANK?
THEY KILLED YOU, HONEY. YOU AND THE CHILDREN.
YOU'RE DEAD.

LET ME UNDERSTAND THIS... YOU FREED EVERYONE FROM HEL?
I EVER TELL YOU WHAT A NICE PLACE YOU HAVE HERE, SURTUR... WHEREVER HERE IS?
STOP IT, LOKI. LET'S SAVE ANY MOCKING FOR THE HUMAN PRETENDING TO BE OUR FATHER.
IT'S ALL A LIE. I'M NOT YOUR BROTHER, LOKI.
DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF, BROTHER.
"WE ACCOMPANIED STEPHEN STRANGE AND THE XEN WARRIORS TO ASGARD ON A MISSION TO RESCUE STRANGE'S FORMER DISCIPLE CLEA FROM THE STRONGHOLD WHERE I MYSELF HAD IMPRISONED HER.
"I'VE LEARNED SO MUCH SINCE THEN. I'VE BEEN SO WRONG ABOUT SO MUCH."
I BEG TO DIFFER, THOR. WE'RE BROTHERS NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, BROTHER SURTUR?
"LOKI ATTEMPTED TO BARTER HIS LIFE FOR CLEA'S.
"ODIN KNEW BETTER THAN TO TRUST THE TRICKSTER GOD, AND SO HE CHOSE ME, INSTEAD, TO BE HER SUBSTITUTE IN HELA'S REALM."

"WHAT ODIN DID NOT KNOW WAS HOW MUCH ABOUT MYSELF AND THE NATURE OF ASGARD I DISCOVERED.
"THE THOR THAT ODIN KNEW, THE THOR HE MOLDED ME INTO BEING, WOULD NOT BE CAPABLE OF FALSEHOOD. THE THOR HE COULD MANIPULATE WOULD NEVER RESORT TO DECEPTION OF ANY KIND.
"NOR WOULD HE EXPECT ME TO USE THE TRUTH AND TWIST IT THE WAY LOKI WAS CAPABLE OF."
LISTEN TO ME, MY FRIENDS!
THE HEROES OF MIDGARD HAVE DEFEATED THE PERSONALITY OF DEATH IN A REALM LARGER THAN THIS ONE!
I, TOO, FOUGHT FOR THIS NOBLE CAUSE. AND WE WERE THE VICTORS! YOU ARE FREE TO LEAVE THIS PLACE! FREE TO CELEBRATE AND SING AND DRINK OF THIS, OH HAPPIEST OF DAYS!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS, HELA, QUEEN OF THE DAMNED?
YOUR IMPRISONMENT IS OVER. YOU'VE BEEN HERE LONGER THAN ANYONE...YOU'RE FREE.
YOUR LIPS CAN TASTE OF LIFE AGAIN, AND NOT OF DEATH.
AND THAT WAS IT. EVERYONE WALKED OUT OF HEL BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD.
BUT ODIN WAS WRONG. LOKI TRICKED HIM INTO CHOOSING ME TO TAKE CLEA'S PLACE.
IF LOKI HAD SHOWN UP IN HELA'S REALM CLAIMING THEY WEREN'T DEAD, THEY'D LAUGH AT HIM. HE TRIED THAT BEFORE, BACK WHEN GALACTUS FOUGHT THE CELESTIALS.
BUT ME...WHO WOULD DOUBT THE WORD OF THE ODINSON HIMSELF?


AIN'T I A STINKER?
"THIS WORLD WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS, ASTRO BOY. JUST AS THIS CITY WAS ONCE THE MOST ADVANCED COMMUNITY ON THE FACE OF THE PLANET."
"THAT'S MAJOR VANCE ASTRO, KARNAK. WHY DON'T YOU STOP TALKING ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU DO KNOW, AND START TELLING US ABOUT WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW."
WHAT YOU WANT TO KNOW, MAJOR, IS HOW YOU ARE GOING TO USE WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THIS TIME PERIOD TO HELP YOU WIN A WAR IN THE FUTURE THAT YOU COME FROM.
YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID, ROCK-HEAD?
OF COURSE I DID.
AT EASE, MAJOR. WE DON'T SENSE DANGER...WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE A CURSED AND SAD CREATURE.
HE WILL TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW BECAUSE THAT IS THE ONLY WAY HE CAN RELATE TO OTHER SENTIENT BEINGS.
HE WILL COMMUNICATE WHAT WE WANT THROUGH OUR APPARENT FLAWS. LET HIM CONTINUE...
"HARDLY CURSED, HERMAPHRODITE. IT IS IMPORTANT, IF YOU CAN GRASP THIS, TO UNDERSTAND THAT MANKIND IS NOT MUTATED BY RADIATION OR PROBABILITIES ALONE.
"WHEN PRIMITIVE MANKIND WALKED THE EARTH, THE BEINGS KNOWN AS THE CELESTIALS CAME TO THIS PLANET WITH THE INTENT OF PROPAGATION.
"THEY MANIPULATED PRIMITIVE HUMANITY, AND THROUGH THEIR ADVANCED SCIENCES, LACED THE HUMAN GENE WITH A MUTABLE SEED, A CHROMOSOME WHICH, WHEN TRIGGERED, WOULD LEAD TO THE POWERS AND MUTATIONS YOU COVET."
THE INHUMAN NATION RESULTED WHEN ANOTHER ALIEN RACE, THE KREE, CAME TO EARTH AND USED THE TERRIGEN MISTS TO TRIGGER THOSE DORMANT SEEDS AND MUTATE A PORTION OF MANKIND INTO A RACE OF SOLDIERS.
WE NEED THESE TERRIGEN MISTS, KARNAK. WE NEED THEM--
TO MUTATE FUTURE HUMANITY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES FROM THE INVADING ALIEN BADOON. I KNOW.
JUST AS I ALSO KNOW THERE ARE NO MORE TRACES OF THE TERRIGEN MISTS TO BE FOUND ON THE PLANET. THEY ARE NOW PART OF THE ATMOSPHERE, AND IMPOSSIBLE TO EXTRACT.
THEN YOU'RE OF NO USE TO US. SHOULD I KILL HIM, MAJOR?
STAR-HAWK?
WE DON'T THINK SO, MAJOR. KARNAK IS ALONE HERE. HIS COMPANY IS WELCOMED BY NO ONE.
IT IS NOT I. THE TRUTH IS NOT WELCOME. NONE ARE WILLING TO FACE THEIR FLAWS FOR LONG.
THIS IS YOUR PLANET, MAJOR, AND WE'VE GOT NOTHIN' TO SHOW FOR THIS TRIP. WHERE TO NOW?
IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, REED RICHARDS KNOWS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING...
"...RICHARDS IS IN NEW YORK CITY. NO MATTER HOW NEW YORK MAY HAVE CHANGED, RICHARDS IS STILL THERE. HE'S GOT TO BE.
"NEXT STOP, THE BAXTER BUILDING."

ARE YOU TELLIN' ME, WALTER, THAT THERE'S A RACE O' ME LIVIN' UP HERE IN CANADA?
WHAT ARE THEY, MY LITTER?
NOT EXACTLY, LOGAN. I BELIEVE THEY ARE YOUR... PACK. OR TRIBE, IF YOU MUST HUMANIZE THEM. IN TIME, EVIDENCE EVEN SHOWS THAT I MAY BE PART OF THIS PACK, AS WELL.
I'M CONSIDERING CALLING THEM YOUR "RACE."
RACE?
HOW SHOULD I PUT THIS? THEY ARE HUMAN IN ONE SENSE, IN MANY WAYS, BUT THERE ARE SUBTLE DIFFERENCES THAT SEEM TO DIVIDE THEM FROM MANKIND, EVEN FROM MUTATED MANKIND.
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE, LOGAN. I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED.
I WAS WONDERIN' WHEN YA'D SHOW UP. AN' I WAS WONDERIN' WHEN YA'D DIG UP THE SECRETS OF MY PAST.
REMARKABLE. AND WHAT--OR WHO ARE YOU?
DR. LANGKOWSKI. WE HAVE MET BEFORE. I AM AARON STACK. WHEN WE MET...WHEN WE FOUGHT EACH OTHER, I WAS KNOWN AS MACHINE MAN.
REMARKABLE.
ALL RIGHT, AARON, SPILL IT. WHO AM I?

LOOK THROUGH MY EYES, LOGAN. WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BY MANKIND BEFORE.
WHAT MAKES ME SO BLAMED SPECIAL?
"I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU. I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE CELESTIALS AND THE MUTABLE SEED PLACED IN EARLY MAN, LOGAN.
"WHAT I MYSELF JUST LEARNED, AND SHOULD HAVE NEVER ASSUMED, WAS THAT NOT ALL OF MANKIND WAS MANIPULATED BY THE CELESTIALS.
"I AM CERTAIN THAT THEY ASSUMED THAT BREEDING AND GENERATIONAL EQUALIZATION WOULD MERELY SPREAD OUT THE SEED FROM THOSE FIRST MANIPULATED.
"BUT THE CELESTIALS WERE WRONG. THEY DIDN'T CONSIDER EARLY BELIEF SYSTEMS AND SUPERSTITIONS. THEY DIDN'T CONSIDER WHAT THEY WOULD BE PERCEIVED AS.
"ONE RACE SAW THE NEWLY CREATED MOON AS A GOD OF SORTS. THEY WORSHIPPED IT AND SOUGHT ITS COUNSEL WHEN IT WAS FULL. THE CELESTIAL SHIP BLOCKED THEIR SIGHT OF THIS ASCENDED SAVIOR, AND THEREFORE, THE CELESTIALS WERE AN ENEMY.
"AS WERE THOSE WITH WHOM THEY CAME IN CONTACT.
"YOU SEE, SOME OF THESE PRIMITIVE BEINGS ESCAPED THE CELESTIAL EXPERIMENTS AND DISTANCED THEMSELVES FROM THOSE ADVANCED BY THE CELESTIALS.
"THEY HID. IN THE WOODLANDS. IN THE SHADOWS AND FORESTS."

"BUT SINCE THESE MOON-WORSHIPPERS WERE NOT 'CHOSEN' OF THE GODS, WERE NOT STAMPED WITH DIVINE RIGHT, THEY WERE SEEN AS LESS THAN HUMAN.
"AND SO THEY BECAME THE HUNTED, AND PREJUDICE WAS BORN UPON THE EARTH.
"IN AN AGE WHEN THOSE WITH THE MUTANT SEED WITHIN THEM STRUCK AT THOSE WITHOUT.
"THE MOON-BEASTS WERE NOT LIKE THOSE MARKED BY THE CELESTIALS.
"THE SEED, THOUGH DORMANT, ADDED TO THE AGGRESSION OF THE EARLY EXPERIMENTAL HUMANS. THEY TENDED TO BE MORE SICKLY, TO HAVE A SHORTER LIFE-SPAN.
"PERHAPS THIS, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, ADDED TO THE PREJUDICE AFFLICTED UPON THE MOON TRIBE.
"AND SOMETIMES, AS IN THE CASE OF YOU, LOGAN, THEY TAKE THE PLACE OF SURROGATE CHILDREN.
"ADOPTED CHILDREN THAT OFTEN BREED ANGER AND RESENTMENT DUE TO THEIR SUPERIOR HEALTH AND ABILITIES.
"IN YOUR CASE, LOGAN, THE FAMILY YOU WERE BROUGHT INTO RESENTED YOUR PRESENCE SO MUCH THAT THEY CONFINED YOU TO A BED AND TRIED TO CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU WERE SICKLY YOURSELF.
"THEY NEVER LEARNED ENGLISH BECAUSE IT WAS NOT REQUIRED, WAS NOT NECESSARY FOR THEIR CONTINUED ADAPTATION.
"THIS WENT ON FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS. THOSE BORN TO THE TRIBE OF THE MOON REMAINED IN THE WILDERNESS, AND ADAPTED TO A WORLD THAT BECAME MORE AND MORE AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS THEM.
"THE MOON-TRIBE, LOGAN, WAS NOT THE ONLY TRIBE, EITHER. THERE ARE OTHERS. THE TRIBE SABRETOOTH CAME FROM WAS PART OF A BEAR CLAN.
"ONCE IN A WHILE, THEY'D BE FOUND BY GYPSIES AND MADE TO LIVE THE LIFE OF FREAKS. MADE TO TRAVEL AND PERFORM BEHIND MIRRORS AND WINDOWS.
"BUT TRANSPLANTED INTO A NEW ENVIRONMENT, YOU WERE NEVER QUITE PREPARED FOR THEIR ACTIONS."
YOU DID BECOME SICKLY, UNTIL THE DAY YOUR HERITAGE RIPPED FREE FROM THE PERSON YOU WERE SUDDENLY BEING RAISED TO BE.
SOMETIMES, WHEN THE MUTANT SEED WAS TRIGGERED, WHETHER IT BE THROUGH RADIATION, PUBERTY, SOME STRANGE MINERAL, OR AS A RESULT OF CANNIBALISM...
...THE MUTATION WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A REVERSION TO WHAT MANKIND WAS BEFORE THE CELESTIAL GENETIC TAMPERING.
LYCANTHROPY AND THE CURSE OF THE WENDIGO ARE EVIDENCE OF THAT.

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, LOGAN?
YOU ARE THE GENETIC STEP BETWEEN PRIMITIVE MANKIND AND MODERN MUTANITY. YOU ARE WHAT MANKIND WOULD HAVE BECOME.
THAT'S IT? I'M SOME SORTA BLAMED MISSIN' LINK? WE'RE THE REAL HUMANS AN' EVERY-ONE ELSE AIN'T?
FIGGERS IT'D BE SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT.
REMARKABLE.
FOR GOD'S SAKE, WALTER, IS THAT ALL YOU CAN SAY ANYMORE?
SO MY HEALIN' FACTOR AIN'T EVEN A MUTANT POWER AT ALL! CHARLIE LIED TA ME WHEN HE ASKED ME TA JOIN THE X-MEN AN' SAID I WAS A MUTANT.
YOU WERE ONE OF A KIND, LOGAN.
XAVIER COULDN'T DEFINE YOU. AND TO THE REST OF THE PEOPLE WALK-ING THE STREETS, YOU WERE AS DIFFERENT AS THEY COME.
OR MAYBE HE DID LIE. YOU KNEW HIM BETTER THAN I DID, LOGAN.
AND ABOUT YOUR HEALING FACTOR, IT'S A REMINDER OF WHAT ALL OF US WOULD HAVE IF THE CELESTIALS HADN'T COME AND MANIPULATED US. THEY DIDN'T BRING US POWER...
...THEY BROUGHT DEATH AND DISEASE TO ALL OF MANKIND.

GOODBYE, BOLT, GOODBYE. YOU ARE DEAD, MY KING, AND LIFE GOES ON.
I AM YOUR QUEEN NO LONGER. THE WORLD HAS CHANGED. MY DUTIES HAVE CHANGED. IT IS A WORLD OF INHUMANS, NOT A CITY.
I AM NOW THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND.
THE WIFE OF BRIAN BRADDOCK, KING BRITAIN.
MEDUSA...?
WE DON'T...I MEAN, I HAVEN'T SINCE MEGGAN...I'M NOT EXPECTING YOU TO...
BRIAN, YOU RAISED MY SON.
AND YOU MARRIED ME TO BETTER CARE FOR MY PEOPLE.
THE LEAST I CAN DO IS CARE FOR YOU AND SEE TO YOUR NEEDS. THIS ISN'T OUT OF DUTY, BRIAN, BUT GRATITUDE.
I...

IT'S OKAY, BRIAN.
MY KING!
MEDUSA!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
AND YOU WILL ADDRESS MY WIFE WITH THE PROPER TITLE BEFITTING A QUEEN OF THE REALM!
BUT THAT'S JUST IT, YOUR MAJESTY. I DON'T KNOW HOW I SHOULD ADDRESS HER...
...CAPTAIN U.K. BROUGHT A GREY GARGOYLE FROM ANOTHER REALITY BACK WITH HER AND HE UNDID THE CURSE ON EXCALIBUR. HE FREED THEM FROM THE STONE THEY WERE TRAPPED IN, MY KING!
QUEEN MEGGAN ISN'T DEAD! SHE'S ALIVE! YOUR WIFE IS ALIVE!

LISTEN TO ME, MY GUARDIANS.
OUR PARADISE IS THE SUBJECT OF CONFUSION AND MISUNDERSTANDING TO THOSE OUTSIDE OF ITS REACH.

THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT I DO, AND THEREFORE CANNOT SEE THAT WHAT WE DO IS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL WHO LIVE...
...AND ALL WHO HAVE DIED.

I FEAR THAT YOU, TOO, HAVE BEGUN TO DOUBT ME.
GO BEYOND THE BORDERS OF THE PARADISE, AND SEE THE GOOD WE ARE DOING. GO AND SEE. KNOW FOR YOURSELF THAT ALL IS WELL.

MATTHEW...WHILE I WAS IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD HELPING FRANK CASTLE, I SAW THE WILSON FISK BUILDING.
THE KINGPIN ESCAPED TO THE REALM OF THE DEAD, AS WELL.

SOME PEOPLE NEVER LEARN, STEVE.
WHERE DID YOU PUT THE JACKAL AND JIGSAW?

I LEFT THEM IN THE BONEYARD OF DEATH'S REALM, WHERE WE FOUGHT THE FINAL BATTLE. I HOPED THAT SOME TIME ALONE THERE WOULD TEACH THEM THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE.
ALONE? YOU LEFT THEM ALONE?
JUST LIKE THOSE WE HAVE LED HERE.
LET'S FLY.
MY NAME WAS ONCE MATTHEW MURDOCK. A MAN WITHOUT FEAR.
BUT I AM VERY AFRAID NOW.
WE FLY BY ALL THOSE NOW TASTING OF PARADISE IN A REALITY WE HELPED CREATE. IN A HEAVEN WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE FOR.
EACH OF THEM, HEROES AND CRIMINALS ALIKE, IS TASTING OF THEIR GREATEST APPETITES AND WANTS, EXPERIENCING THE DESIRES AND HOPES THEY'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF.
WHEN THE KINGPIN OF CRIME WAS ALIVE, HE FED APPETITES UNTIL THEY BECAME ADDICTIONS. HE FED PLEASURES UNTIL THEY GREW TO BECOME PAINFUL.
I AM APRAID THE SAME WILL HAPPEN HERE, IN THE DREAM REALM OF UNLIMITED WANT.
I AM TERRIFIED THAT GIVEN TIME, OUR HEAVEN WILL BECOME HELL.
WE'RE ALMOST OUTSIDE.

WE EMERGE FROM THE PARADISE AND ENTER THE NEGATIVE ZONE, A REALM FIRST DISCOVERED IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING BY THE LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, REED RICHARDS.
A REALM THAT RICHARDS, ON BEHALF OF HUMANITY, SWORE TO NEVER CORRUPT AGAIN.
THIS IS A LITTLE BEYOND THAT.
MR. MURDOCK? THIS HARDLY SEEMS TO BE CONCLUSIVE PROOF OF THE GOOD WE ARE DOING...
MAR-VELL SAID WE'D SEE THE GOOD WE WERE DOING HERE...DOESN'T HE SEE...?
UNLESS HE CAN'T SEE OUTSIDE THE PARADISE.
I KNOW WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE FEARED...THEY ARE AFRAID OF US.
I KNOW NOTHING OF FEAR, VICTOR, BUT I KNOW SOMETHING OF BLINDNESS.
THEY CAN'T SEE US. THEY'RE ATTACKING THE PARADISE.
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT THESE BEINGS?
THAT'S NOT THE QUESTION, STARK.
THE QUESTION IS, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT MAR-VELL?
"And he that strives to touch the stars, oft stumbles at a straw." — Edmund Spenser

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

"Susan Richards?"

"Who is that?"

"My name is Aaron Stack. I'm the new Watchman of Earth. I'm a friend of your husband."

"Isn't everybody?"

"I've been visiting other friends of yours as well... Wyatt Wingfoot... John Jameson... Kurt Wagner... they have found that I have information that is of a help to them. I see history, but many times, I cannot see the heart. Interpreting the soul is guesswork to one such as I."

"What information do you bring me, Aaron?"

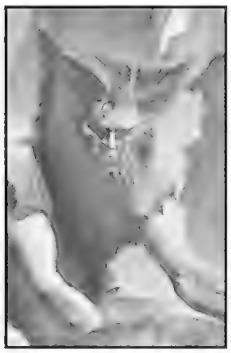
"Well, it's information that I seek. I can ask you nothing now that Kyle won't know I'm asking, but I wonder, since he knows everything, if it would not be better for myself to have a... second... opinion on what is happening in the Realm of the Dead. What is it like to... well..."

"Live there?"

"Well, yes. I've seen that you are restless, you sleep almost as little as Reed. I wondered if this was not the result of his forming your new body from his own. But, I have suspicions that it is not. What do you see when you close your eyes, Susan? What do you see when you allow yourself to be cast into the unconscious world?"

"Why should I tell you, Aaron? I don't much like the idea that there's someone like you watching me even when I sleep."

"I understand, Mrs. Richards. This must be very difficult for you. I don't know why you pretend to not have any memory of that realm. But I believe you would like to speak of it. To someone. I see that you have something to say, Susan. Perhaps all I have to offer you this day is an ear, albeit a mechanical one."



"I..."

"Reed loves you very much."

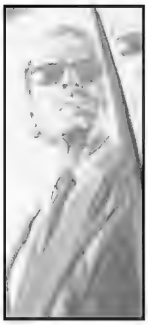
"I know...too..."

"What?"

"I haven't told my husband about what it was like in Death's Realm because I'd rather still be there."

"I see."

"I love Reed... you have to understand that. This isn't because I don't care for him. It's not that I don't want to be with him or near him. I always have. And in Death's



Realm, where I was dead, I wished that I could see him again. I wanted to so badly, but he was dead to me. And life had to go on. And it did."

"The picture I've been given of Death's Realm is one in which people live as sort of echoes of the past. They live their days as if it were the same day over and over again, repeating itself but never moving forward."

"No...that's not it. There is a lot of pain in that place, Watchman. But the pain comes from knowing how many people have died, how many friends have been lost. Life there becomes simpler. You spend more time doing the little things, the things that bring meaning. I can see how it would be perceived as a reoccurring nightmare."

"But I've been told that those trapped in the Realm of the Dead spend their days fighting useless battles again and again."

"And that is how many spend their days, those at least that find their meaning in that sort of thing. If Reed were to be there, I would imagine his every moment would be spent locked away in some room where he could think."

"I don't understand. Is this a good place?"

"No. I didn't say that. I just said I wished I was still there."

"Please explain."

"It's like a melting pot."

"Death's Realm?"

"I don't know your story, Watchman. I don't know who you were or what you've experienced. But there are moments that are rare for every person, even rarer in my line of work."

"Super-heroing?"

"Yes. There are moments when life seems to take a pause, when all the dangers, all the alien invasions, all Doom's attempts to kill us, all the attacks on our family stop to take a breath of air. Those moments seem to last forever in the Realm of the Dead. And there are times when..."

"Yes?"

"When... it's really hard to explain. I don't know what I mean by this. But it seems like there were moments when I became more Sue Richards than I ever was before, as if I were hit by a wave of sorts that brought greater clarity to who I am. I don't know. It's funny speaking to you this way. I feel like Reed... and I am Reed, aren't I? This is his body. It's just that I miss those moments of definition. I miss those times when I knew more than ever who and what I was. I miss the surge. It was like a drug, an addiction to becoming more me. And I don't mean that in a self-absorbed way."

"I too understand what it is like to long to be more human. But you are here, now."

"I know. And I fear it is not for Reed's well-being."

"I don't understand."

"Reed was going to leave Earth, Watchman. He was going to let it be blown up and everyone in it."

"But there was nothing he could do. It was beyond his ability to save it."

"Nothing is beyond my husband's abilities. If you've watched him as you say you have, you know this."

"And Franklin?"

"I'm a mother, Watchman. How do you think I feel knowing that my son has to be dead to me for the sake of everyone in existence? How do you think I feel knowing the place I went to after I died felt more real than this life?

How do you think I feel knowing that if everyone in existence died, I would have my son with me? That things would be better?"

"Susan?"

"I'm not even so certain I should answer to that name. I'm more Susan

amongst the dead than I am here."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Do? I'm going to be the good little wife Reed wants me to be. You know, Reed doesn't merely affect his own form, he affects all of ours, for the good of the rest of the world. I will do what I've been brought back to do. This world, Watchman, is the myth. I will wait for the reality I've only just tasted with each day to come."

CHAPTER FIVE

"Aaron?"

"Yes, Kyle?"

"The Baxter Building in New York City is about to become a focal point to a great number of beings from various worlds and times. The likelihood of so many arriving in one moment is like a comedy of errors."

"Coincidence?"

"Perhaps...but what is coincidence except evidence of the sloth of those not willing to seek a greater design? It is a voluntary blindness, a decision of haste."

"Then what? And why the Fantastic Four's old headquarters? I know that Annihilus, Blastaar and another of the inhabitants of the Negative Zone have triggered a number of alarms there. Their return to Earth is prompted by the growing mass at the heart of the Negative Zone, a mass that will envelop them all if it goes unchecked. Reed Richards will be going to the Baxter Building to heed the alarms' warnings. Is this what you are talking about?"

"Reed Richards is too involved in the search for a new Death to go to the Baxter Building. He will send a surrogate ambassador of his own."

"Who?"

"Who would you send? If he were still alive, I would send Victor Von Doom."

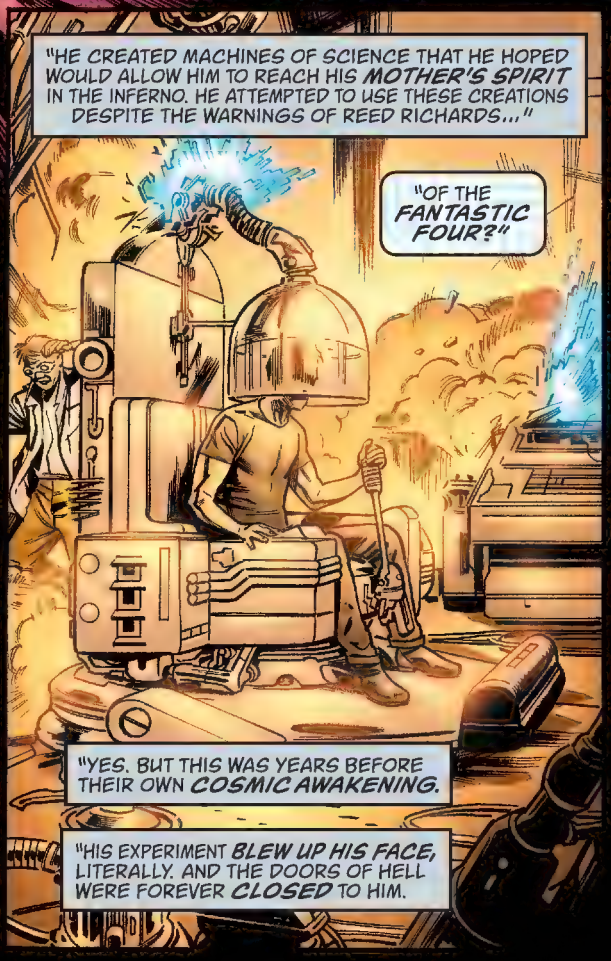
"Why Doom?"

"Because Victor Von Doom would be incapable of failure."

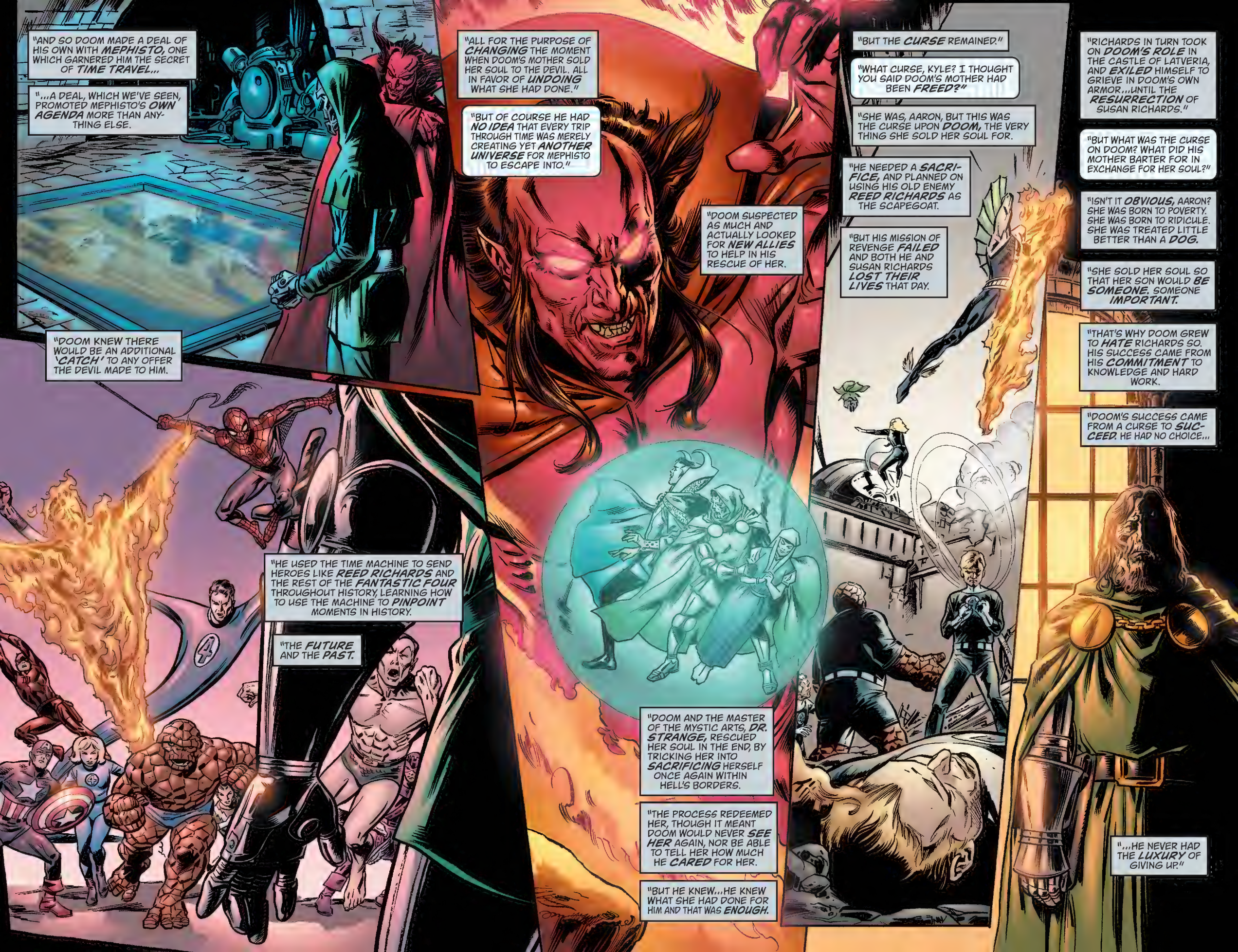
"DOOM'S MOTHER WAS A WITCH. A GYPSY BORN TO RAGS AND PARLOR TRICKS.
"SHE DIED SHORTLY AFTER COMPLETING A RITUAL DEALING WITH SATAN, HER SOUL AND BLOOD BECOMING HIS FOREVER.

"VICTOR'S FATHER DIED OF EXPOSURE TO THE COLD A FEW YEARS LATER, AND THE HATRED FOR THE LOSS OF HIS PARENTS WOULD BECOME THE SINGLE MOTIVATING FACTOR IN VICTOR'S REACH FOR ADULTHOOD."
"WAIT--BUT WHY, KYLE? WHY WOULD DOOM'S MOTHER SELL HER SOUL TO THE DEVIL? WHAT DID SHE WANT?"

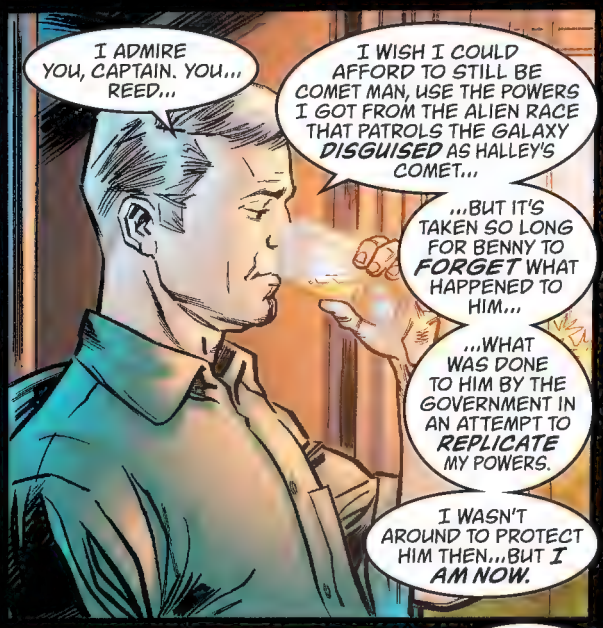
"YES...THAT IS WHAT VICTOR WANTED TO KNOW AS WELL, AARON.
"LONG BEFORE HE MET AND BECAME FRIENDS WITH REED RICHARDS, HE DISCOVERED HIS MOTHER'S HUNGER FOR THE OCCULT...
"...AND SPENT HIS WAKING HOURS STUDYING BOTH THE SCIENCES AND THE ARCANE REMNANTS OF HIS MOTHER'S DALLIANCES WITH THE UNDERWORLD.


"HE CREATED MACHINES OF SCIENCE THAT HE HOPED WOULD ALLOW HIM TO REACH HIS MOTHER'S SPIRIT IN THE INFERNO. HE ATTEMPTED TO USE THESE CREATIONS DESPITE THE WARNINGS OF REED RICHARDS..."
"OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR?"
"YES. BUT THIS WAS YEARS BEFORE THEIR OWN COSMIC AWAKENING.
"HIS EXPERIMENT BLEW UP HIS FACE, LITERALLY. AND THE DOORS OF HELL WERE FOREVER CLOSED TO HIM.

"RUMORS OF HIS SCARS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.
"SOME SAID HIS FACE WAS SEARED BEYOND RECOGNITION.
"OTHERS WHISPERED THAT IT WAS MERELY A THIN SCAR RUNNING DOWN HIS CHEEK THAT SENT HIM TO TIBET TO BECOME THE ARMORED DOCTOR DOOM."
"BUT WHEN I LOOK AT HIM THROUGH THE WATCHER'S EQUIPMENT, I DON'T SEE ANY SCAR AT ALL, KYLE."
"NONE SAVE THAT LEFT BY THE FAILURE TO SAVE HIS MOTHER.
"VICTOR CHOSE TO NEVER SHOW HIS FACE TO THE WORLD AGAIN. AND SO HE RETURNED TO HIS STUDY OF MAGIC NOW THAT SCIENCE HAD FAILED HIM.
"AFTER BECOMING A MASTER OF SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT, DOOM RETURNED TO EUROPE AND OVERTHREW THE KING OF A SMALL BALKAN NATION KNOWN AS LATVERIA.
"THE PEOPLE OF THIS NATION CHEERED HIM FOR THE PROSPERITY HE BROUGHT THEIR COUNTRY...
"...DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEY HAD TRADED THEIR CITIZENSHIP FOR A TYPE OF SLAVERY.
"DOOM WOULD HAVE BEEN SATISFIED TO BE A KING...EVEN THE WORLD MARVELED AT HIS RISE TO POWER.
"BUT AT LAST, HE DISCOVERED WHY AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE HIS MOTHER SOLD HER BODY AND SOUL TO THE DEVIL.
"AND HE KNEW HE WOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED AGAIN."


"AND SO DOOM MADE A DEAL OF HIS OWN WITH MEPHISTO, ONE WHICH GARNERED HIM THE SECRET OF TIME TRAVEL...
"...A DEAL, WHICH WE'VE SEEN, PROMOTED MEPHISTO'S OWN AGENDA MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.
"DOOM KNEW THERE WOULD BE AN ADDITIONAL 'CATCH' TO ANY OFFER THE DEVIL MADE TO HIM.
"ALL FOR THE PURPOSE OF CHANGING THE MOMENT WHEN DOOM'S MOTHER SOLD HER SOUL TO THE DEVIL. ALL IN FAVOR OF UNDOING WHAT SHE HAD DONE."
"BUT OF COURSE HE HAD NO IDEA THAT EVERY TRIP THROUGH TIME WAS MERELY CREATING YET ANOTHER UNIVERSE FOR MEPHISTO TO ESCAPE INTO."
"DOOM SUSPECTED AS MUCH AND ACTUALLY LOOKED FOR NEW ALLIES TO HELP IN HIS RESCUE OF HER.
"HE USED THE TIME MACHINE TO SEND HEROES LIKE REED RICHARDS AND THE REST OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR THROUGHOUT HISTORY, LEARNING HOW TO USE THE MACHINE TO PINPOINT MOMENTS IN HISTORY.
"THE FUTURE AND THE PAST.
"DOOM AND THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, DR. STRANGE, RESCUED HER SOUL IN THE END, BY TRICKING HER INTO SACRIFICING HERSELF ONCE AGAIN WITHIN HELL'S BORDERS.
"THE PROCESS REDEEMED HER, THOUGH IT MEANT DOOM WOULD NEVER SEE HER AGAIN, NOR BE ABLE TO TELL HER HOW MUCH HE CARED FOR HER.
"BUT HE KNEW...HE KNEW WHAT SHE HAD DONE FOR HIM AND THAT WAS ENOUGH.
"BUT THE CURSE REMAINED."
"WHAT CURSE, KYLE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID DOOM'S MOTHER HAD BEEN FREED?"
"SHE WAS, AARON, BUT THIS WAS THE CURSE UPON DOOM, THE VERY THING SHE SOLD HER SOUL FOR.
"HE NEEDED A SACRIFICE, AND PLANNED ON USING HIS OLD ENEMY REED RICHARDS AS THE SCAPEGOAT.
"BUT HIS MISSION OF REVENGE FAILED AND BOTH HE AND SUSAN RICHARDS LOST THEIR LIVES THAT DAY.
"RICHARDS IN TURN TOOK ON DOOM'S ROLE IN THE CASTLE OF LATVERIA, AND EXILED HIMSELF TO GRIEVE IN DOOM'S OWN ARMOR...UNTIL THE RESURRECTION OF SUSAN RICHARDS."
"BUT WHAT WAS THE CURSE ON DOOM? WHAT DID HIS MOTHER BARTER FOR IN EXCHANGE FOR HER SOUL?"
"ISN'T IT OBVIOUS, AARON? SHE WAS BORN TO POVERTY. SHE WAS BORN TO RIDICULE. SHE WAS TREATED LITTLE BETTER THAN A DOG.
"SHE SOLD HER SOUL SO THAT HER SON WOULD BE SOMEONE. SOMEONE IMPORTANT.
"THAT'S WHY DOOM GREW TO HATE RICHARDS SO. HIS SUCCESS CAME FROM HIS COMMITMENT TO KNOWLEDGE AND HARD WORK.
"DOOM'S SUCCESS CAME FROM A CURSE TO SUCCEED. HE HAD NO CHOICE...
"...HE NEVER HAD THE LUXURY OF GIVING UP."

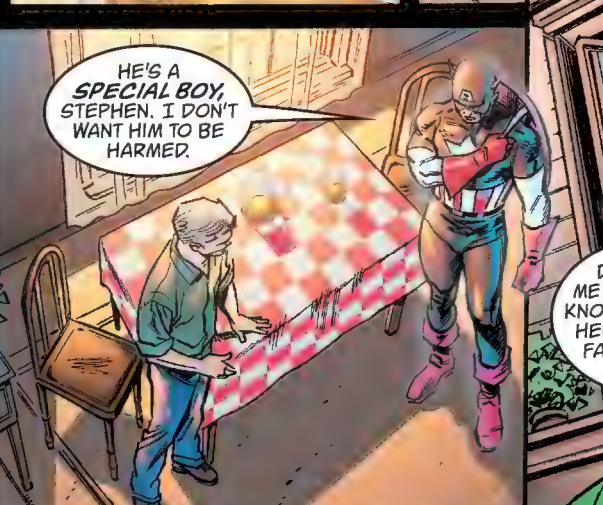
I HAVE NO CHOICE.
I HAVE NO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT HERE IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD. WHAT I DO NOW, I MUST. I'M CAPTAIN AMERICA.
AM I SERIOUS?
I'LL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE DEATHS THAN ALL WARS COMBINED.
THE RED SKULL'S RECORD IS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT I'M CONSIDERING HERE.
NO. NOT ALL...DEATH HAS NO MEANING HERE. I'M NOT KILLING THEM...
...THEY'RE ASLEEP. I'M NOT SUGGESTING ANYTHING BUT ONE GIANT WAKE-UP CALL.
HEY, CAP!
HI, BENNY. HOW ARE YOU?
GOOD. MY DAD WANTS TO TALK TO YOU.
HE SAID THAT IF YOU EVER CAME BACK, TO INVITE YOU IN.
IT'S HARD FOR ME TO REMEMBER THE DAY REED RICHARDS DIED...WE WERE OLD FRIENDS, I DON'T KNOW IF I TOLD YOU THAT.
NO, YOU DIDN'T.
I KEEP FORGETTING THAT FOR THOSE WHO EXIST IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD, THOSE THAT ARE STILL LIVING ARE THOUGHT TO BE THE DECEASED.
STEPHEN BECKLEY WAS COMET MAN FOR A LONG TIME, A HERO MOST FAIL TO REMEMBER.


I ADMIRE YOU, CAPTAIN. YOU... REED...
I WISH I COULD AFFORD TO STILL BE COMET MAN, USE THE POWERS I GOT FROM THE ALIEN RACE THAT PATROLS THE GALAXY DISGUISED AS HALLEY'S COMET...
...BUT IT'S TAKEN SO LONG FOR BENNY TO FORGET WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM...
...WHAT WAS DONE TO HIM BY THE GOVERNMENT IN AN ATTEMPT TO REPLICATE MY POWERS.
I WASN'T AROUND TO PROTECT HIM THEN...BUT I AM NOW.

WELL, MR. BECKLEY--
STEPHEN.
STEPHEN...

...I NEVER HAD A SON. BEING A SOLDIER, YOU GET USED TO TAKING LIFE OUT OF THE WORLD, NOT BRINGING IT IN.
THE THING IS, CAP, I DON'T WANT YOU HERE.

I DON'T WANT BENNY'S POWER REAWAKENED BY THE ADVENT OF SUPER HEROES IN HIS LIFE.
MAYBE THAT MEANS THIS NEIGHBORHOOD HAS TO GO WITHOUT COMET MAN AS A CHAMPION...
...BUT I'M AFRAID OF WHAT BENNY MIGHT BECOME IF HE WERE REMINDED OF HIS POTENTIAL.


HE'S A SPECIAL BOY, STEPHEN. I DON'T WANT HIM TO BE HARMED.

DON'T GET ME WRONG, CAP. KNOWING YOU'RE HERE MAKES A FAMILY FEEL SAFE.
BUT I'M SURE YOU HAVE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO THAN TALKING TO RETIRED SUPER HEROES.

MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TAKE ME TO ANOTHER PART OF DEATH'S REALM.
TO ANOTHER OLD MAINSTAY OF THE SUPER HUMAN COMMUNITY FOR WHOM HERO WAS A MORE AMBIGUOUS TERM.
CASTLE?
THEY WEREN'T IN THERE, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE THINKING.
WHO?
MY FAMILY. THEY LEFT ME, ROGERS. THEY WERE HORRIFIED BY WHAT I DID TO THOSE CRIMINALS.
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE EASY. BUT IF NO ONE CAN DIE HERE, THEN PUNISHMENT KIND OF LOSES ITS PURPOSE.
FRANK, YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUNISH ANYONE ANYMORE. YOU NOW FULLY ACCEPT THE FACT THAT YOU'RE DEAD. I CAN TAKE YOU TO THE NEW PARADISE NOW.
NOT WITHOUT MY FAMILY...
HOW DO I CONVINCE THEM?

IF YOUR FAMILY EXPERIENCED WHAT THEY EXPECTED TO KILL THEM, THEN THEY'D HOPEFULLY REALIZE THEY WERE ALREADY DEAD.
NO.
ARE YOU TELLING ME TO WILLINGLY PUT MY FAMILY IN HARM'S WAY?
THE YEARS YOU SPENT PUNISHING CRIMINALS WERE YEARS SPENT KILLING THE MEMORY OF YOUR FAMILY, FRANK. YOU KNOW THAT.
WHAT KIND OF ANGEL ARE YOU?
ANGELS DON'T KILL...AND THEY DON'T LEAVE IT OPEN TO SUGGESTION.
I DON'T KNOW...WHAT DO ANY OF US REALLY KNOW ABOUT ANGELS?
IF IT WERE REVERSED, ROGERS, IF IT WAS YOUR FAMILY THAT WAS STUCK HERE, WHO COULDN'T SEE THAT THEY WERE DEAD, COULD YOU DO WHAT YOU'RE SUGGESTING TO ME?
...NO.
IT'S TIME, ROGERS.
WHY COULDN'T I JUST BE SENT TO HELL?

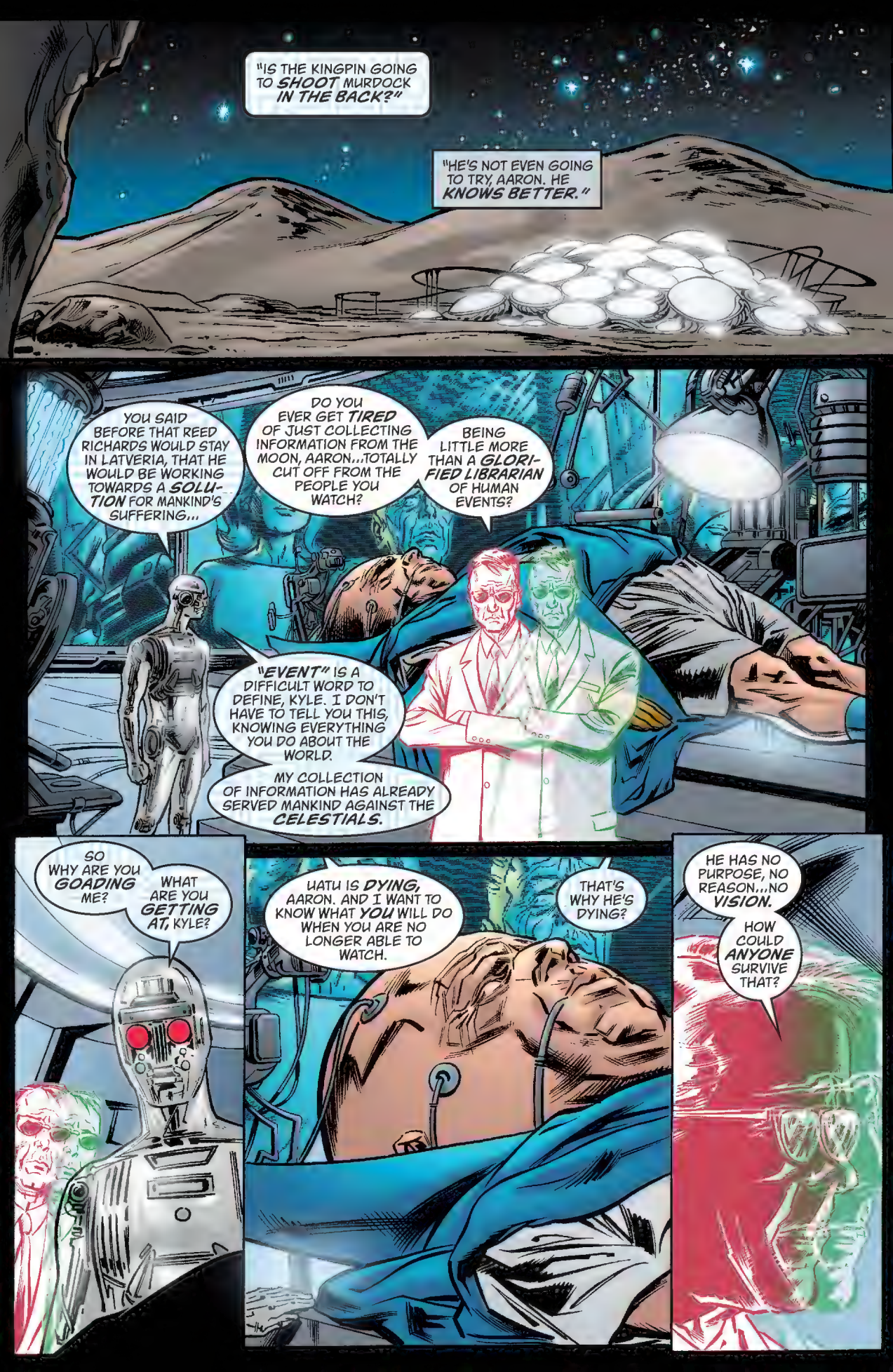
THEN WE ARE AGREED...MAR-VELL'S OMNISCIENCE IS NOT OMNISCIENCE AT ALL.
THERE ARE PLACES... POCKETS OF REALITY LIKE HERE IN DEATH'S REALM, LIKE THE NEGATIVE ZONE, WHERE HE CANNOT SENSE OUR THOUGHTS.
OR PERHAPS, LIKE IN THE CASE OF KYLE RICHMOND, WHO NOW CALLS HIMSELF THE 4D MAN, HIS KNOWLEDGE ONLY EXTENDS TO THOSE SUBJECTS HE FOCUSES UPON.
I DON'T KNOW, GREY. OMNISCIENCE IS OMNISCIENCE.
THE REAL QUESTION MIGHT BE WHY HE'S ALLOWING US TO GO ON AND PLAN THE MUTINY WE'RE BEGINNING TO.
THAT IS WHAT WE'RE DOING, ISN'T IT?
YES, STARK. THAT IS WHAT WE'RE DOING.

WHAT IS IT, MATTHEW?
THAT HEARTBEAT... BUT...
...OF COURSE. HE'D HAVE TO BE HERE.
PLEASE, DOOM.
I AM MORE THAN HAPPY TO BE OF AID.
IT'S AMAZING HOW A LITTLE THING LIKE DYING CAN CHANGE YOUR WHOLE DISPOSITION ON LIFE. THANK YOU, VICTOR.
I'LL CALL WHEN I NEED YOU.

WHEN I LIVED, MY NAME WAS MATT MURDOCK. WHEN I WAS A CHILD HERE IN HELL'S KITCHEN I WAS IN A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.
AND WHILE THE ACCIDENT TOOK MY SIGHT AWAY, IT ALSO AMPLIFIED MY OTHER SENSES. I COULD HEAR, SMELL AND TASTE BETTER THAN ANYONE ON EARTH.
WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN WHY WILSON FISK HATED ME SO MUCH.
ON PAPER, FISK WAS WITHOUT BLEMISH...A CASEBOOK EXAMPLE OF THE AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR. A TOWER IN THE COMMUNITY.
BUT OFF PAPER, HE WAS A DIFFERENT KIND OF CASEBOOK ALTOGETHER.

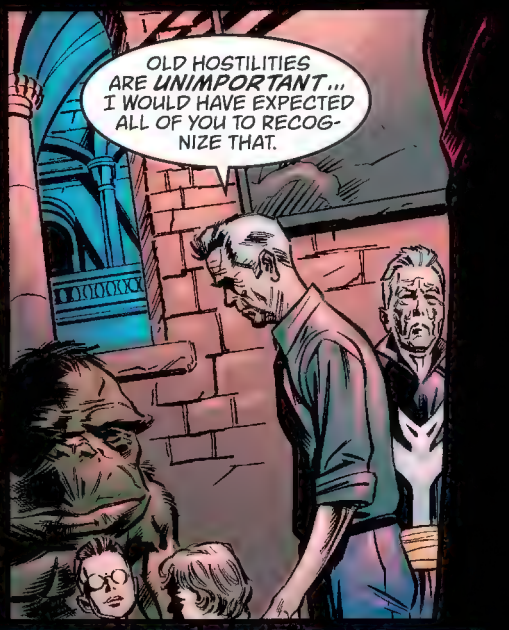
REGARDLESS OF THE LAWYERS AND LOOPHOLES HE HID BEHIND, I COULD HEAR HIS HEARTBEAT FALTER WHEN HE LIED.
I COULD HEAR THE WHISPERS OF HIS MEN FROM HALF A CITY AWAY, WHEN THEY TOLD HIM OF HIS PROFITS IN PROSTITUTION, DRUGS, BLACKMAIL, AND WORSE.
I WAS A LAWYER ONCE. MAYBE THE ONLY ONE THE KINGPIN COULDN'T BUY OR BULLY.
NO MATTER HOW MANY OF HIS MEN HE SENT AFTER ME.
HELLO, MATTHEW.
EVEN IN DEATH YOU HAVE AN ALMOST SINGULAR TALENT TO IRRITATE.

THINGS HAVE CHANGED, KINGPIN.
THEY DON'T HAVE TO CHANGE...LET US SPEAK ABOUT POWER, MATTHEW. YOU AND I CAN BE THE POWER OF THE CITY ONCE AGAIN.
WE COULD--
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, KINGPIN. YOU CAN'T USE THE LAW THE WAY YOU ONCE DID. NOT HERE.
THERE WILL BE NO MORE BATTLES IN THE COURTS.
I'M NOT A LAWYER ANYMORE.
THEN WHAT ARE YOU?
YOUR JUDGE.


"IS THE KINGPIN GOING TO SHOOT MURDOCK IN THE BACK?"
"HE'S NOT EVEN GOING TO TRY, AARON. HE KNOWS BETTER."
YOU SAID BEFORE THAT REED RICHARDS WOULD STAY IN LATVERIA, THAT HE WOULD BE WORKING TOWARDS A SOLUTION FOR MANKIND'S SUFFERING...
DO YOU EVER GET TIRED OF JUST COLLECTING INFORMATION FROM THE MOON, AARON...TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM THE PEOPLE YOU WATCH?
BEING LITTLE MORE THAN A GLORIFIED LIBRARIAN OF HUMAN EVENTS?
"EVENT" IS A DIFFICULT WORD TO DEFINE, KYLE. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS, KNOWING EVERYTHING YOU DO ABOUT THE WORLD.
MY COLLECTION OF INFORMATION HAS ALREADY SERVED MANKIND AGAINST THE CELESTIALS.
SO WHY ARE YOU GOADING ME?
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT, KYLE?
UATU IS DYING, AARON. AND I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU WILL DO WHEN YOU ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO WATCH.
THAT'S WHY HE'S DYING?
HE HAS NO PURPOSE, NO REASON...NO VISION.
HOW COULD ANYONE SURVIVE THAT?

IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE YOU AGAIN, WYATT. YOU SHOULD COME AND STAY WITH US HERE AT THE CASTLE... EVERYONE ELSE DOES.
THANK YOU, SUSAN.
SEEING YOU ALIVE AGAIN, AFTER EVERYTHING...STEVE... JENNIFER...WELL, IT SORT OF PUTS THINGS IN A NEW PERSPECTIVE. MAKES ME THINK IT'S NEVER QUITE OVER, YOU KNOW?
I NEED YOU TO GO TO NEW YORK AND CHECK OUT THE BAXTER BUILDING, WYATT.
SOMETHING TRIGGERED THE ALARMS IN OUR OLD HEADQUARTERS... SOMETHING WHOSE ORIGIN COMES FROM THE NEGATIVE ZONE.
I'M SORRY, WYATT. I SHOULD BE THE ONE ACTUALLY GOING, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING I'M NEEDED FOR HERE...
I UNDERSTAND, REED. DON'T WORRY.
IT'S A LITTLE MUCH TO EXPECT THAT ALL THE EMERGENCIES WE FACE WOULD HAPPEN ONE AT A TIME.
I'LL CONTACT YOU ONCE I GET THERE. AND I'LL USE THE HOLOGRAM IF I NEED TO.

IS HE HERE YET?
HE JUST ARRIVED.
THE ANT-MEN DIDN'T WANT TO BRING HIM IN. I THINK THEY'RE HAVING A HARD TIME FORGETTING HE ONCE TRIED TO KILL THEM.
THAT MAY GO FOR ALL OF US.


OLD HOSTILITIES ARE UNIMPORTANT... I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED ALL OF YOU TO RECOGNIZE THAT.

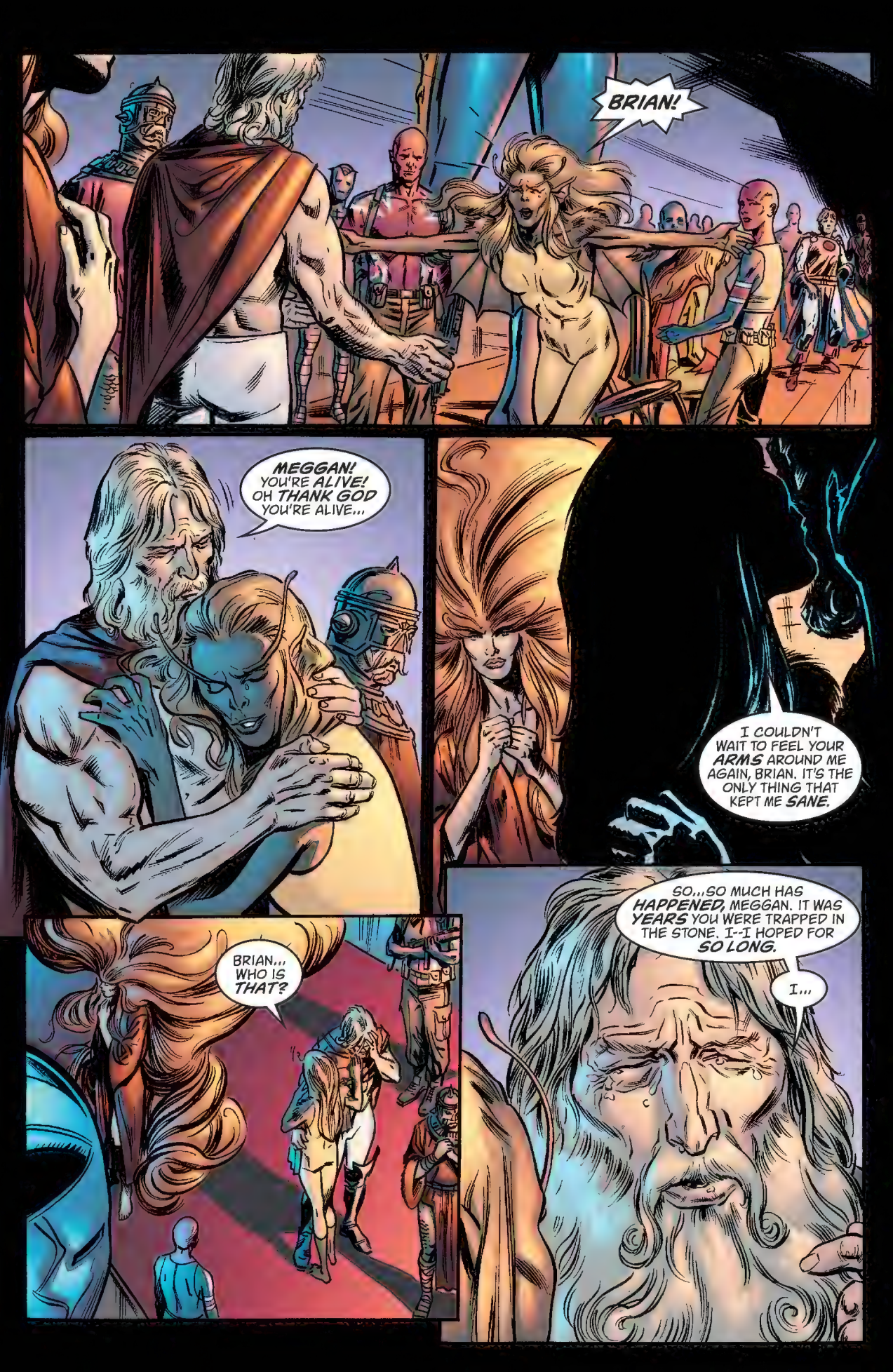
THAT'S THE LEAST OF IT, REED. IN THE END, YOU WILL ALL BE CONSIDERED THE SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS AS IT IS.
YOU KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU?

LET'S GO MEET SMITHERS.

I CAME, RICHARDS!
QUITE THE ASSEMBLY YOU HAVE HERE! YOU...IMMORTUS... McCOY...BANNER... ME.
YOU PRETTY MUCH GOT THE BEST MINDS IN THE WORLD HERE.

WE WILL HAVE, ONCE BEN GRIMM GETS HERE.

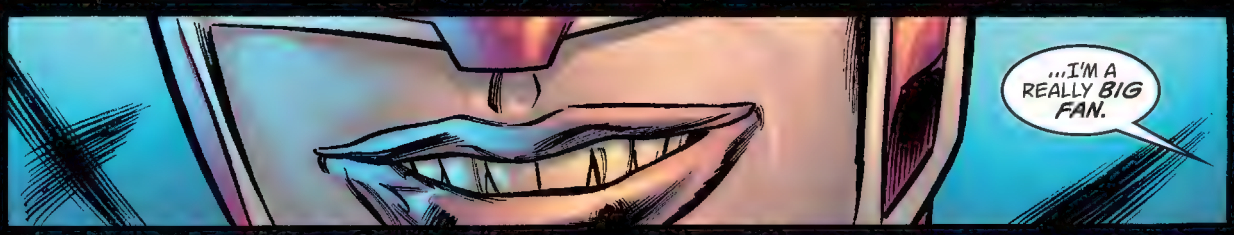
"THIS WAY, YOUR MAJESTY."
THIS IS IMPOS-SIBLE!
SHE'S NOT STONE ANYMORE? BUT HOW DID--?
CAPTAIN U.K. BROUGHT A GREY GARGOYLE FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION.
HE UNDID THE CURSE OUR EARTH'S VERSION PUT ON YOUR FELLOW TEAM-MATES...
...AND THE QUEEN.
B-BRIAN?

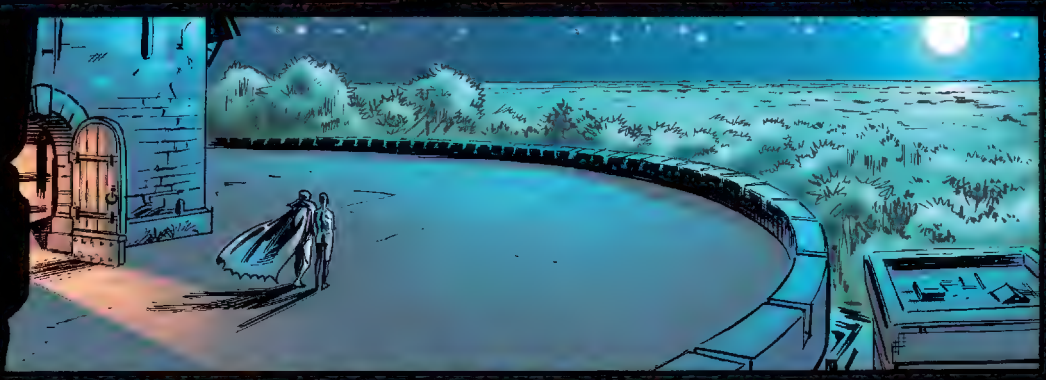

BRIAN!
MEGGAN! YOU'RE ALIVE! OH THANK GOD YOU'RE ALIVE...
I COULDN'T WAIT TO FEEL YOUR ARMS AROUND ME AGAIN, BRIAN. IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT KEPT ME SANE.
BRIAN... WHO IS THAT?
SO...SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED, MEGGAN. IT WAS YEARS YOU WERE TRAPPED IN THE STONE. I--I HOPED FOR SO LONG.
I...

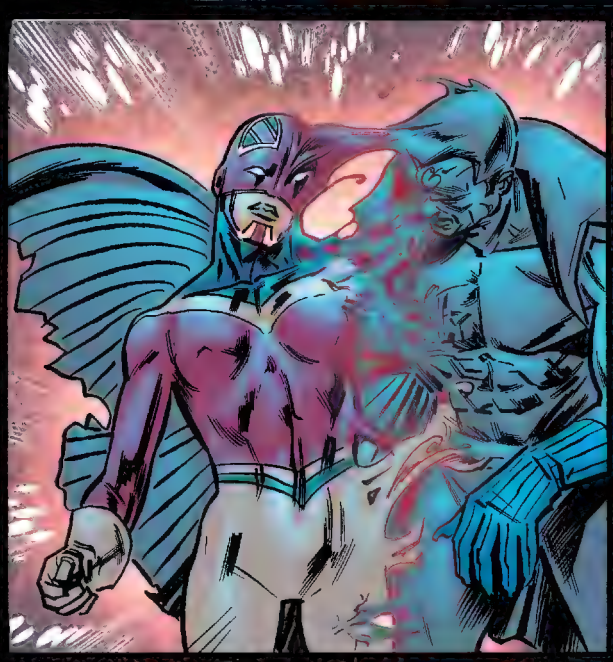
QUEEN MEDUSA?
AM I?
OF COURSE YOU ARE!
I AM SORRY FOR YOUR PAIN, YOUR MAJESTY. I KNOW YOU WERE JUST MARRIED TO THE KING, AND THEN WE ARRIVED.
WHO AM I TO VALUE MY MARRIAGE ABOVE THE LIVES OF THREE PEOPLE?
OR THE HAPPINESS OF BRIAN?

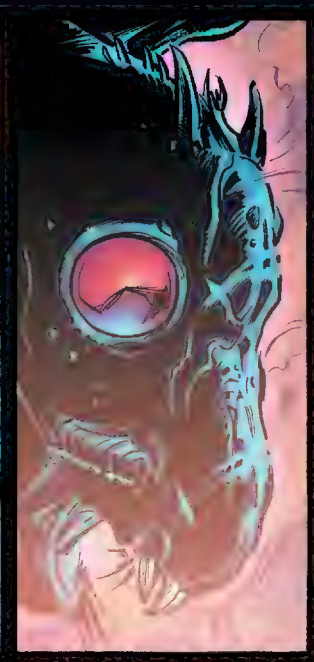
YOU-YOU'RE MARRIED?

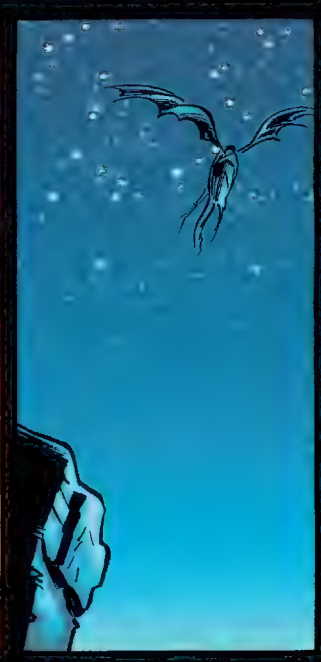
WE'LL SEE WHAT OUR SURGEONS CAN DO ABOUT THIS ARM, MR. WAGNER.
I'M NOT WHAT I WAS THEN. IT CAN'T COME BACK TOGETHER.
HOW THE HELL DID THAT HAPPEN?
YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A NEW NAME, NOW THAT WHITMAN'S BACK, KNIGHT.
TELL THE KING THAT WE'LL RETURN AFTER WE CATCH THE DARE-DEVILS SHOW IN LATVERIA...


...I'M A REALLY BIG FAN.









THE OLD MAN'S LOOKING PRETTY HARD FOR US.
I'VE GOT TO THINK THAT YOU'RE SOME KIND OF GENIUS TO THINK OF HIDING IN JERSEY...
...I MEAN, WHAT WOULD A GOD BE DOING HERE OF ALL PLACES?
WE'RE NOT GODS, LOKI.
THE FACT THAT WE KNOW THAT THREATENS EVERYTHING HE CARES ABOUT. WE'VE TAKEN THE MOST PRECIOUS THING HE HAS...
...WE'VE STOLEN FROM HIS DREAM.
"Let us agree, there is no one single reality. Not upon this stage, not in this world, all is in the mind…imagination is the only truth. Because it cannot be contradicted except by other imaginations." — Richard Matheson

P A R A D I S E X

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

THE REJECT

"Reject."

"You know me?"

"I do."

"Then you know why I have allied myself toRichards' team. Why I am here."

"I know what you want me to know. You think that Richards will be able to undo the effects of the mutations upon this world. You think that in time, he will be able to change you. To help you become what? A deviant? Ugly? What? I'm not even certain you know what you want. You don't seem particularly moved by words of courage or hope, nor do you seem moved by anything apart from the promise of change in your appearance."

"You are right. I don't know. I don't care for the alliances of either side. I am here because it suits me for now. I am here in case Richards really can be helpful to me. I am here for other reasons as well."

"I guessed this. I watch you get a far-off look in your face at times. Like you're listening to someone who isn't even in the room."

"I hear them."

"Who?"

"My brothers."

"The Deviants?"

"Why have you never asked about them? Why have you never considered the threat they would bring?"

"Because they do not seem like a threat. I have seen them, Reject. I would warn people if the Deviants began to do anything. But they don't. They huddle in the back alleys and whisper of the day when they will once again be the dominant species on the planet. They sound like old men, Reject, old men that have forgotten how weak they've become."

"They, like the Eternals, will outlive everyone on Earth."

"Not anymore. Everyone's an Eternal now that Death is dead."

"When early man grew in prominence, who do you think suggested we play the role of demons?"

"Who?"

"Mephisto."

"Fine. He seems to be everywhere, working in everything. I can believe

he was also playing in the field of the Eternals and Deviants. What's your point?"

"He speaks to us in our thoughts. He is calling us to himself. He is drawing us from our hiding places to himself. He has promised us a new Lemurian Age. But not an era limited to one piece of land...but the entire planet."

"Then why are you with Richards? Will you betray him?"

"I do not know what you mean by betray. Will I do whatever I can to change this hideous way I appear? Of course. Will I do anything I can to be accepted by my brothers? Of course. You cannot judge me, robot. You too, long to be something you are not."

"I can judge you, Reject, and I will. Why do you want to be accepted by a race that has been marked throughout human history by hatred and evil? Why do you want to be welcomed by beings that only know rage and pettiness? They kill for little or no reason at all. Why would you want to be a part of that?"

"It is what I am."

"No it is not."

"It is."

"Then you must hate the gods very much."

"Why?"

"They defined you a long time ago. They decided to make you alone beautiful amongst the ugliness of your fellow Deviants. They made you what you are. And you will never become any more than what you are now. They
must have hated you to deny you any freedom of self-expression."

"I will destroy you, robot. You cannot talk to me like this. I am not beautiful. I am hideous."

"Ugliness is in the eye of the beholder, is that it? It's not. Beauty is never determined by who receives it. It , whether we bother to look at it or not. You are beautiful, Reject. As a being, you are flawless. And that's why the Deviants fear and hate you. The are the rejected and flawed sons and daughters of the Celestials. And only you seem to bear a resemblance to those the Celestials approved, the Eternals. And for that, the Deviants have tried to bind you to their own approval. They sit upon judgment of you and they have determined your steps because you have allowed them to."

"So what would you have me do, robot?"

"When you hear their voices, what do they say?"

"They say I am nothing. They say that if I am to be one of them, I must go to them..."

"Where?"

"They haven't said where as of yet."

"When?"

"Soon. Very soon."

"What are they waiting for?"

"For Reed Richards."

"Richards?"

"Then you are here to betray Richards."

"I haven't said that. Richards is making choices and allying himself with only those that agree with him. Words spoken by people like Bruce Banner and Stephen Strange have no effect on Richards. I don't know if his present course is in accordance with the Deviant wishes or not. But I do know that they are waiting for something to happen."

"Will you let them have Richards if they require it of you?"

"I don't know."

"You will have to choose a side. A line is being drawn. And the line grows longer every day. For good or evil, you will have to choose."

"I don't want to choose."

"Them you truly are a reject. Not because that is what the Deviants called you, but because you fail to see that when you choose a side, when you choose anything at all, you spit in the face of those that claim to be the masters of your definition. You spit in the eye of your intended purposes. As it is, you have not chosen at all. Choosing your own desires is not a choice at all, although it is closer to mankind's enemies' points of view. Ask yourself, Reject, between you and I, who is the robot?"

AFTERWORD

YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD THE RUMORS ABOUT ALEX'S AND MY DISLIKES FOR CERTAIN CHARACTERS IN THE MARVEL MYTHOS.

You've maybe heard of Alex's dislike for Wolverine. I myself was never much of a fan of either Iron Man or the Hulk. But before you get too offended at our personal appreciation, or lack thereof, of any of your favorite heroes, there's something that you need to know that happened to both Alex and me as we labored on the *Earth X* trilogy.

IN THE PROCESS OF writing *Earth X*, I had the opportunity to write/reinterpret the origins and lives of Iron Man and the Hulk. And perhaps for the first time, I really looked at them. I really dug into their entire histories and considered what they were and who they might be, and I learned to love Iron Man. I now totally got the Hulk, completely understood who he was and what he might be. The same happened with Wolverine in the writing of the volume you hold in your hands. (We always thought Dr. Doom was cool, though.)

AND IN THE END, I think that that's what makes the Marvel Universe, and in fact all of Marvel continuity, amazing. The more you read, the more you look at and dig into this continuity, the more you see. There isn't a bad character in the bunch. Look at Moonboy. Who could have guessed he was an ancestral forefather of Wolverine? (I won't use this as a forum to discuss my take on Rick Jones, a character neither Alex nor I cared for. That's for Volume two.)

ALL THOSE STORIES that were written, all those characters and battles that were drawn, mean something. Something important. It doesn't matter when you entered the Marvel Universe, when you read your first Marvel comic. All of the stories, all of the continuity, play an integral part in who and what these characters are today. They were formative events in the lives of these heroes. And just like me, the more you give to it, the more you consider the amazing stories that have been written for so many years, the more you'll get out of it, the more you'll appreciate what's come before and think about what's to come.

THE MARVEL UNIVERSE and the lives that have been created there are not just Stan Lee's or Jack Kirby's or Steve Ditko's legacy. They're Roy Thomas's. Starlin's. Mantlo's. Claremont's. David's. Buscema's. Miller's. Infantino's. Romita's. Everyone who ever gave to this mythology has become part of its back story. Alex and I are just grateful to add our chapters to it all.

JIM KRUEGER

6/2003

A TESTAMENT TO THE WORLD I GREW UP IN, AN EPIC EPITAPH FOR THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, AND IT'S A COOL-ASS COMIC!

BEGINNING THE FINAL CHAPTER IN THE *EARTH X* TRILOGY

IN *EARTH X*, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE FANTASTIC FOUR, THOR, THE HULK AND THE X-MEN DISCOVERED THAT THEIR PURPOSE — AND THE MEANING OF ALL SUPER HEROES AND MUTATED PEOPLE IN THE UNIVERSE — WAS NOTHING MORE THAN TO PROTECT THEIR HOST PLANET, IN THIS CASE EARTH, FROM OUTSIDE INVASION. THEY LEARNED SUPER HEROES ARE MERELY BIOLOGICAL ANTIBODIES TO PROTECT A GROWING EMBRYO WITHIN THE EARTH. AN EMBRYO FOR THE CELESTIAL RACE: THIS IS THE WAY THESE GODS REPRODUCE. BUT RATHER THAN DIE AND ACCEPT THEIR FATE, HUMANITY FOUGHT BACK — ONLY TO CAUSE A TERRIBLE ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCE, A RIFT AT ITS CORE THAT IN TIME WOULD WIPE OUT ALL LIFE ON THE PLANET.

IN UNIVERSE X, CAPTAIN MARVEL WAS REBORN ON EARTH YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH. BUT HE ALSO STILL CLAIMED TO WALK IN THE REALM OF THE UNLIVING, WHERE EARTH'S FALLEN CHAMPIONS STILL EXIST. MAR-VELL LED A TEAM OF HEROES IN A QUEST FOR THE GREATEST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION ON EARTH, SUGGESTING THIS WOULD LIMIT THE DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY THE GROWING POWER STRUGGLE ON THE PLANET. BUT THIS WAS NOT HIS ONLY REASON. FOR HIS CRUSADE ON EARTH ONLY SUPPORTED AND ARMED A BATTLE HE FOUGHT IN THE REALM OF THE FALLEN, A BATTLE AGAINST DEATH HERSELF. THOSE LIVING CHAMPIONS WHO DIED IN HIS COLLECTION OF ARTIFACTS WERE ADDED TO THE BATTLE RAGING IN THIS OTHER REALM. MAR-VELL LED A CHARGE AGAINST DEATH AND KILLED HER.

BUT NOW THAT DEATH IS DEAD, NO ONE WILL EVER DIE AGAIN. THEY MAY WRITHE IN PAIN IN HOSPITALS BECAUSE THEIR BODIES HAVE BEEN BROKEN BEYOND REPAIR, BUT THEY WILL NOT DIE. THEY WILL CALL OUT FOR AN END TO THEIR SUFFERING. THEY WILL CRY OUT FOR PEACE. BUT THERE WILL BE NO ANSWER.

PARADISE WILL BE DENIED THEM.

YES.

DEATH IS TRULY DEAD.
LONG LIVE THE LIVING.

JOIN CREATORS ALEX ROSS AND JIM KRUEGER IN THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED, AWARD-WINNING X TRILOGY—FEATURING THE ART OF DOUGIE BRAITHWAITE, BILL REINHOLD, STEVE PUGH, STEVE YEOWELL AND BILL SIENKIEWICZ.

COLLECTING THE FIRST HALF OF THE *PARADISE X* SAGA: *PARADISE X #O, #1-5, PARADISE X: XEN* AND *HERALDS #1-3*.